



FEATURED ARTIST

“CRAZY AL” EVANS

By Nick Camara

He’s one of the most celebrated artists on the Tiki scene. He’s also the frontman of one of the most popular Exotica bands, APE. If modern Tiki culture had a face, it could be the face of “Crazy Al” Evans. I first met Crazy Al at the 2004 Tiki Oasis. I had heard he was a terrific Tiki carver but had never met him. At first sight, I saw a tall, slender guy with long hair that had a bone in it. He was doing a dance and really enjoying himself. I thought, “Maybe this guy really is crazy.” After talking with Al, a person comes to understand that he is a fun loving, intelligent, soft-spoken and extremely talented guy. And, he’s not totally crazy.



Crazy Al started life as Allan Evans in the summer of 1967 in Phoenix, Ariz. Al, who grew up in the affluent suburb of Scottsdale, describes his childhood as kind of a Leave It To Beaver existence. Al’s father was a South Pacific veteran from Chicago who became a doctor and moved out west. He had a knack for collecting Hopi Kachina dolls. “My father loved loud Aloha shirts and the television show, Hawaii Five-O.” It seems the coconut didn’t fall too far from the tree.

A family trip to Hawaii at the age of 5 would also have a big impact on young Al. “I remember loving Hawaii, it was so different. I was completely in awe of my surroundings. I also liked the fact that pretty girls were giving me attention, putting leis around my neck and kissing me on the cheek. You can’t beat that.” The trip served as an awakening, and although 25 years would go by before Al returned, exotic Hawaii stayed with him. Returning to Phoenix, he had to settle for the Big Surf water park as his only tropical outlet. The many local icons like the Kon-Tiki Hotel in Phoenix were also an influence. “I remember my older sister, Cathy, coming home from the Scottsdale Trader Vic’s, and remarking on what a great time it was. She was 18 and I was eight.”

Al’s interest in art goes back as far as he can remember. “I always loved art; I remember winning my school’s grand prize ribbon for a toothpick sculpture of a lifeguard tower in the third grade.” He also remembers sculpting faces in dirt mounds and working with a form of Play-Doh that his mom made from scratch.



JACK OF ALL TRADES

An early hero of Al’s was his grandfather, Edwin Goff Cooke, born in 1900. “My grandfather was the most influential person in my becoming an artist. He really helped direct the artistic talent that I had.” Al describes him as a “jack of all trades. He worked in the printing trade with color separation...he was an artist. My grandfather had a total love of the arts. He was practiced in drawing, painting, filmmaking, acting, and loved them all. He also loved science. To a small child, he seemed to be an expert in everything. He would give me little lessons in all of the above. My grandfather was the first person who took an interest in me as an artist. It wasn’t until after my ‘Crazy Al’ nickname was given to me that my mom told me about my grandfather’s chronic back pain. He fell from a ladder. Seems he was using it not to paint, but rather to stand



Early Encounters: Al at age 5 hanging out with a friend at the Kauai Marketplace, 1972. photo: Robert Evans



“It seems the coconut didn’t fall too far from the tree.”



The unique 2005 commissions for Creative Capers Entertainment, an animation studio that specifically asked for elements of their business to be incorporated into the carvings. photo: Tikimania.com



A 2004 Tiki covered in black velvet upholstery with a base featuring black velvet painting. photo: PhotoBob.com



2002's Tiki Number 50, featuring an intricately carved, colored Hibiscus flower. Photo: Tikimania.com

I was this kid from Scottsdale who wanted nothing more than to run around in the jungle with Tarzan.

as Crazy Al. The nickname has stuck ever since." The Swingin' Tikis also provided Al with his first opportunity to do Tiki carvings. He created wood Tiki necklaces for the band. This would lead to Al's first major Tiki Project. One of Eric's final Art Center assignments was to mix the talents of graphic design, illustration, photography, etc. in a joint project. Eric chose to do album art for the Swingin' Tikis based on his drawing of little Tiki men band members. "I had now switched to a 3-D illustration style," Al remarks, "and did one of my sculpted wood dioramas for Eric's project. It had a Tiki Island theme with a real, miniature lagoon and King Kong 'Swingin' Tiki Wall.' Fellow student Mitch Tobias, also now in APE, photographed my illustration. It ended up in the school gallery." The next Tiki creation was a 10-inch pencil in which a Tiki was carved. This was also designed by Eric Rindal and photographed by Mitch to use as an image on Eric's first business card.

Al created Crazy Al's Bone Productions right out of school. This one-man company created many of small Tiki images for an as yet untapped market. In 1996, a friend commissioned Al to carve his first large Tikis based on his previous small images. His style of carving is conceptual and highly detailed. Al has been known to spend well over 30 hours on a Tiki. He looks at each carving as a new adventure because each palm log is different. "I try to use the whole log. I leave a lot un-carved and even exploit the bark of the tree in the carving itself. I want to keep the 'living' aspect of the wood alive. I think I've created an oxymoron, 'Fine Art Tiki.' My inspiration comes from Tiki as a meaningful object. I wish to create something conceptual, completely new and

individual. Yet I'm working within a particular subject matter not thought of as completely new or individual." Al lists his artistic influences as Primitive Art, such as the Kachina dolls of his youth and a fascination with National Geographic type images. "Primitive man used art to speak to God or at least understand what God is. That's powerful stuff."

Some of the special Tikis and projects Al has been involved with include Tikis for Tiki's Grill & Bar at the Aston Waikiki Beach Hotel. "Creating Tikis for Hawaii and the first Tiki bar in Waikiki in sometime is an honor for me." The installation of two Tikis for the front entry of Creative Capers Entertainment, an animation studio, is another project Al is proud of. "Using the animators' design and then incorporating my mixed media techniques on the pieces were great challenges. I did a 12 x 6-foot stucco Tiki fireplace in Los Angeles, and recently made the real lava rock Tiki fire place for the Lucky Tiki in Mission Hills, Calif." His 8-foot Tiki in the Lucky Tiki has also received a lot of notoriety.

Al has been known to work in tandem with the multi-talented Bamboo Ben of Huntington Beach, Calif., in creating some of the coolest Tiki bar/restaurants around. "The décor of the Hale Tiki in Augusta, Ga., as well as the new Kona Club in Oakland were both very fun and creative projects." Most recently, a five Tikis in one, 7-foot sculpture is the highlight of Al's career. It was done as part of an incredible Tiki Room interior that Bamboo Ben created for Lee Unkrich (the Tiki featured on the cover of this issue). "This is my first attempt at using abalone inlay. It was extra cool to use hand-me-down abalone shell scraps from Ben's family's historical beach combing."

Crazy Al's art has been in many art shows over the years. The first was a show by *Tiki News* at the La Luz de Jesus Gallery in Hollywood in 1996.



These Tikis were carved for walkin': Al's first Tiki Art Show piece. Carved Purple Heart shoes created for the Oct. 4, 1996 "21st Century Tiki" show at La Luz de Jesus Gallery in Los Angeles. photo: Jonpaul Balak

The Tiki featured was from a palm tree that he dug up at his boyhood home in Arizona. It had a cow bone in its nose that Al found while hiking in Sedona. "Tiki Shoes," also featured in this first show, is still one of Al's favorite pieces. Other California Tiki shows include: Cacao Coffeehouse in West Los Angeles, Copro-Nason Gallery in Culver City, M Modern Gallery in Palm Springs and both Tiki Art Now! shows at the Shooting Gallery in San Francisco. In 2005 Al had a front

window space at the Shooting Gallery along with Tiki Tony for a Tiki Room installation.

A traveling retrospective show planned for August through December 2006 features 10 plus years of his Tiki art, with stops in Long Beach, San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego. As well as highlighting Al's past works, each show will debut a new Tiki mug design. The new mugs are a continuation of Crazy Al's Tiki Gallery Collection. Al will also have other new merchandise for sale at these events.

The Tiki mugs that Al has sculpted include four mugs for Tiki Farm released from 2000 to 2002. He started Crazy Al's Tiki Gallery Collection with his own mug of Tiki#13 in 2004. He created the APE mug and later the APE cookie jar, both co-designed by Eric Rindal in 2004. He did the sculpt for the Electric Tiki shot glass based on their logo, and created a Tiki Farm Don Ho mug that came out in 2005.

Al has also sculpted for the toy business. He's done work for several marketing firms working with Disney and Warner Brothers characters. His Lion King figurines are something to see.

As a departure, Crazy Al has revisited painting, as witnessed by his black velvet "Edgar's Eden" displayed in his Tiki Art Now! installation. This painting reflects a future project that Al has in the works – a calendar featuring his Tikis but photographed like Exotica album art. "The shots would feature my Tikis photographed with an exotic model. It would look similar in style to the old Exotica albums of yesteryear." He got the idea from friend and photographer Sean Murphy. They did a shoot for the inside art for APE's CD 'Jungle Gems', which featured one of Al's Tikis with an exotic model. "An idea was born! We have to make a calendar!"

GOING APE

Adding to his repertoire, Crazy Al takes his art to the stage. He is the frontman for the San Francisco-based Exotica band APE. Al does Tiki carving on stage and provides lead vocals for the band. It is something that must be seen in person to fully appreciate. You haven't lived Tiki until you've seen APE. Live Tiki carving with smooth Exotica sounds, then wild drums and dancing 'til dawn. For eight years APE has wowed folks with their unique shows. This means a lot of traveling, considering Al lives in Huntington Beach.

Crazy Al's artistic talent, sense of humor and outgoing personality make him a natural for the media. He's been featured on television numerous times in local broadcasts in Orange County, Los Angeles, Palm Springs and San Francisco. He has appeared on national TV for the Discovery Channel's Dude Room, and TV Guide Channel's Ready, Set, Change. Al's voice is even in a seven-second sound chip in Fiesta Toy's plush Tiki Party line.

As you might expect, Al's a very busy guy, but has taken the time to be involved with several



A 1992 creation for friend and Ape band-mate Eric Rindal. photo: Bone Productions



A rare look at the Tiki mug in design stage: Al's sculpt for the Tiki Farm Hibiscus Head mug, 2000/01. photo: Tikimania.com



A rare collaboration between Al, Von Franco, Bamboo Ben and Tiki Farm produced this limited-edition Chalice for the Bahooka's "Von Franco & Friends: A Night of Tiki" show in July, 2004. photo: Tikimania.com



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charitable causes, including Tsunami Relief and the American Stroke Association. In 2005, Al raised over \$8,000 for the American Stroke Association's Train To End Stroke. He did this by finishing the Honolulu Marathon and raffling off the 100th Tiki of his career to contributors. "I can't thank the Tiki community enough for their support," Al said. In his spare time, Crazy Al likes to collect Primitive Art and do just about anything active. He likes to go snowboarding, skateboarding, biking, hiking or beach bumming.

Crazy Al feels Tiki has a bright future. "Tiki is about escapism. I was this kid from Scottsdale who wanted nothing more than to run around in the jungle with Tarzan. It's the search for nirvana, a comfort zone. I feel Tiki will never die. People are very nostalgic. As long as there's ocean breezes blowing and waves crashing on a group of islands called Hawaii, there will be Tiki!"

For more information on Crazy Al Evans, his upcoming art shows and the Exotica band APE, visit his website at www.tikimania.com.

2005's Tiki Number 100, featuring an intricately carved sacred heart and Tapa cloth designs. photo: Tikimania.com