



# MUSICAL NOTES

A Publication of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii Office of Buddhist Education Music Committee

January 2013 Issue



## Masami Hironaka's Lifelong Love of Music

By Joan Tamori



A strong desire to interview Mr. Masami Hironaka came from my remembrance of his enthusiasm and confidence in accepting the challenge of teaching a medley of songs and gathas to an island-wide children's choir in preparation for the Centennial Celebration of Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii back in 1989. These children represented the four Hongwanji temples on Maui. He was the ideal person for the job as it was a significant assignment to prepare the children for the massed children's choir in Honolulu which would be directed by Mrs. Mitsuyo Saito. Though small in stature, I remembered that this was a man who was a dynamo in personality and perseverance. I had the pleasure of accompanying his choir on the piano and found it a most satisfying experience working with him and the children. The children delighted in learning the special songs and gathas from him.



Masami Hironaka: AKA  
"The Ukulele Man"



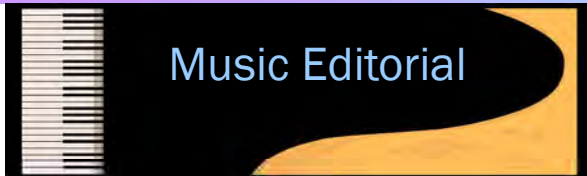
I was convinced that I would be dialoguing with a person who undoubtedly would have a significant past. Indeed it was, as his life story began to unfold before me.

A yearning to sing and a love for music blossomed when Masami was only in the fourth grade at Paia School on Maui. When his class had an opportunity to sing, his teacher immediately realized that there was a distinctive voice resounding amidst his students. Masami was discovered and was informed by his teacher that he had a 'good' voice. At such a young age when most children were busy playing with marbles and bean bags or more immersed in playing outdoor games, Masami was fascinated with the "Hit Parade" which was comprised of the top songs in the nation. He listened intently to every program without fail enabling him to memorize the words of all the songs in their entirety. Back then he might have been perfect to audition for programs which one might think of as precursors to American Idol or the X Factor of today!

As his school years continued, his love of music was ever present on his mind and his intention was to enroll in music courses in high school. However, while attending Maui High School, his desire to take up band or chorus was curtailed due to the fact that in the 1940's, if you were headed for college, college preparatory courses did not include band or any other discipline of music. This setback did not halt his thirst for music as he began his studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. It was by coincidence that he was eventually given the opportunity to step into the world of music. As a freshman participating in initiation week, he thought he would try venturing into the ROTC army barracks to actually audition for the choir. As you might guess, his talent was revealed once again. This time, the music professor/director, Dr. Norman Rian, exclaimed, "I want you in my choir!" Thus, as the second tenor in an a cappella choir, he had realized not only his niche but a foundation of long-lasting friendships and an immense admiration for his teacher. Greats such as actor, James Shigeta, ("Jimmy" to Masami), Shigeru Hotoke, who later became the director of the choir at Kailua High School, and renowned singer, Emma Veary, were among his treasured friends in the choir. After four performance-filled years under Dr. Rian's baton, he was offered to join his professional singing group called the Gleemen of Honolulu. Masami was in his fifth year and doing his intern teaching so consequently since he was still a student, he was not required to pay for costs ordinarily incurred by professionals. A special performance in which he acted and sang playing the role of a 'small Chinese boy' stands out in his mind during this stint. As you can imagine, Masami tremendously valued and held those years in highest regard. Dr. Rian made a huge impact and instilled in Masami a "lifelong love of music".

He embarked on his teaching career on Maui in 1952 teaching fifth grade at Haiku School for two years at which time his devotion to music launched the start of ukulele and chorus classes for fifth,

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## GIVE FOLKS WHAT THEY WANT

By Francis Okano

Minutes before halftime, as the college marching band was about to take to the field in a recently televised football game, the ESPN commentator asked the uniformed drum major his thoughts. Looking cool and collected, the lad replied, “The only thing going through my mind is, give the people what they want!”

A neat attitude, I thought – for performers of every stripe. If this sounds like salesmanship, well, it is. The Madison Avenue approach might go something like: first, know what your customers want; second, know what you have to sell them; third, convince them that what they want is what you have to sell. In advertisement, as in life, if success eludes at first, try, try, try again.

I think the sales process differs little with pianists. People, after all, have to want what pianists have to offer, or pianists don’t survive. I can still hear my teacher say, if you want your playing to sing, you must first hear in your head how a passage sounds, then you must produce that sound, and, finally, you must *feel* that sound as you produce it; then, and only then, will listeners *hear* your music. Pianist Claudio Arrau put it this way: “You have to be in love with [the piece] as you play it; at that moment it has to be the most beautiful music you’ve ever played. If I want, I can criticize it later.” Only by baring the music’s emotional beauty in the most revealing light does the pianist convince listeners of the music’s importance. Each may hear something different, but all are moved.

The legendary pianist Leopold Godowsky is more forceful:

The artist who is incapable of communicating his emotions to the keyboard...rarely electrifies his audiences. Every concert is a test of the artist’s sincerity, not merely an exhibition of his prowess.... He must have some vital message to convey to his audience or else his entire performance will prove meaningless, soulless, worthless.

That emotional, or artistic, aspect of piano playing is, after all, the “sacred fire” that is lit, re-lit, and passed from one generation to the next within the breasts of music-lovers.

I would think something of this passion burns inside every organist who toils week after week to lead the congregation in song. Yet maybe organists do well to ask themselves from time to time, do we regard today’s gathas as if they were the most beautiful ever written, for now? Do we do enough to stoke that “sacred fire” of musical artistry? Do we “give the people what they want”? The cynic might ask, why bother? Besides salesmanship, perhaps the best answer was given by an organist at a temple music seminar a while back. As you approach the organ before a service, he said, feel that it is a *privilege* to play the organ. If you feel it an honor to contribute music, you cannot help but give your best. After all, it is an opportunity given to only a few – a few upon whose shoulders rests a good deal of the worship mood of many.

### Translation Subcommittee Report By Mitsuyo Saito

The following gathas were completed in 2012:

- Lullaby for Children of the World* (Nonnosama from Midou Ensokai Booklet)
- How Happy I Am* (Go-on Ureshiya from Midou Ensokai Booklet)
- Awakening* (Nyushin from Gatha book, pg. 112)

The committee is working on two more gathas for the year 2013:

- Yasashisani Deattara* (When Kindness Greeted You)
- Yurusareshi* (Be Allowed To)

Translation subcommittee members: Francis Okano, Rev. Shigeaki Fujitani, Ruby Nagao,  
Osamu Kawabata, Florence Wasai, Wendie Yumori, Mitsuyo Saito



Hironaka: continued from page 1

sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. He established ukulele and choir groups for children for two years each at Makawao and Paia Elementary Schools. His keen interest in ukulele also took him to Lanai and Molokai on weekends to offer ukulele lessons to adults and children through a free county-sponsored program. While on Lanai, in exchange for food and 'camping in' at Lanai Hongwanji, he gladly gave ukulele lessons to the Fujinkai ladies!

Masami's connection to Hongwanji was kindled in 1954 while attending Paia Hongwanji Mission (no longer in existence today, changed to present day Makawao Hongwanji Mission). Rev. Shoten Matsubayashi approached Masami to sacrifice one Sunday of golf to listen to Rev. Kiyoshi Matsukuma who became the first director of the English department of the Sunday School. Rev. Matsubayashi must have seen the potential in Masami to become instrumental in expanding their program. Hence, the Maui Hongwanji Sunday School Teachers Association was established of which Masami became the first president leading over 50 teachers for the duration of four years. He conducted workshops for teachers, assisted teachers in Lanai, and became a commissioner representing Maui to attend meetings at Honpa. He was the first Maui delegate to the Far West Sunday School teachers conference in Stockton, California. He became acquainted with Honolulu teachers and attended Honpa Hongwanji services. He associated with the 'in' crowd and on one weekend was invited to attend the first picnic of Honpa Hongwanji members at Hanauma Bay. He hitched a ride, jumped into the back seat, and sat next to a girl he quickly fell in love with. Needless to say, this girl named Catherine, would eventually become his wife in 1959. In a period of five and a half years, he served as vice principal at four elementary schools in Oahu: Liliuokalani, Maunawili, He'eia, and Pearl City Highlands transferring each time due to the decrease in enrollment counts.

His leadership roles were noticed and subsequently he was offered to chair the legislative committee of HEA, the Hawaii Education Association (the predecessor to HSTA) which back then included all teachers, administrators, and also the University of Hawaii. Politicians were becoming his circle of friends and he later resigned to become chief lobbyist for HEA proposing legislation from time to time. Though diligent and immersed in this position, he knew this was not his career path. Acknowledging this fact, his brother Sam, who was just opening up Maui Savings and Loan, asked him to return to Maui to purchase an 'okazuya' next door. Masami and Cathy packed up their belongings and moved to Maui but instead he returned to the department of education as Vice Principal at Kahului School. It was then that he became an active member of Kahului Hongwanji though later joining Wailuku Hongwanji in order for his son to enroll in the scouting program and daughter in 4-H. His mother being a devout member of Kahului Hongwanji pulled him back and he once again became active and formed an adult choir of about 30 to 40 members singing occasionally in four-part harmony. The choir sang at special services and events. Also in 1997 while living in Pukalani, he started an adult choir at Makawao Hongwanji Mission. The Fujinkai ladies of Maui and Lanai may recall learning gathas to sing at state conventions from Masami.

Following their father's example, children Guy and Wendy, actively lead and participate in the dharma school, 4-H, Jr. YBA, and various temple boards both on Maui and at Honpa. He is pleased that his grandchildren have an inclination towards music as well. As for improving our music programs, he suggests that each temple should designate one, two, or even three Sundays a month to have gatha practice after their services. He feels that gatha singing is an integral part of services and "all members should know how to sing our gathas". His career/life on Oahu and Maui has been both impressive and eventful yet mindful of continuously living in gratitude the jodo shinshu way... with a sprinkling of classical music on the radio and easy listening music on t.v. channel 839 to relax him, of course.



*Congratulations!*



Our one and only [NOLA NAHULU](#), Choralfest music director extraordinaire, will be honored as a Hongwanji Living Treasure at the Giseikai Aloha Luncheon on February 9, 2013 at the Sheraton Waikiki Hotel. It is a fitting honor for a deserving person!



**KAUAI DISTRICT**  
By Gladys Fujiuchi

## Lihue Hongwanji Members Inspired by Choralfest Gathas



The Lihue Hongwanji choir reorganized and have been learning the Choralfest gathas with the use of the CD's. Our main purpose now is to get the congregation to learn new gathas and sing along with the choir. There was much appreciation and enjoyment of the Choralfest performance through the DVD provided by Roy Yumori and thank you to Joy Nishida for the CD's of the Choral-fests past and present.

## Big Islanders "Wowed" By Choralfest 2012

**HAWAII DISTRICT**  
By Ethel Miyashiro

The musical highlight for 2012 was the biennial Choralfest held on O'ahu on August 4-5<sup>th</sup>. Preceding the Choralfest practice and service was a Friday evening reception filled with wonderful food, talent and the renewal of many friendships and the beginning of new ones. The Big Island was represented by 25 singers whose overall impressions of the weekend were the amazement of Nola's ability to elicit out such sounds from the 100+ singers as well as Francis' fabulous piano accompaniment. Below are a few excerpts of reflections submitted by some of the attendees:

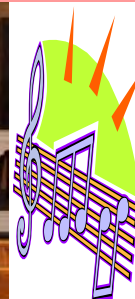
Arlene Kawabata (Kamuela Hongwanji): "For me, among the best things about Choralfest was learning beautiful new gathas in English and having to work with Ms. Nola Nahulu."

Carol Tsunozumi (Puna Hongwanji): "Practice at Puna, practice in Hilo, practice as we're driving, practice alone, practice together – practice makes perfect, family goes nutty! WOW!! The sounds of music filled Hawaii Betsuin. It was a chicken skin moment."

Marge Elwell (Na'alehu Hongwanji): "Two years ago I went to Puna Hongwanji for a Sunday service and no one was there...so, I thought I would at least go to Hilo Betsuin for some mindful meditation. The alternative proved to change my life. The sound from Sangha Hall was a bit of Pure Land Bliss. The beautiful harmony and the happy eyes and warm atmosphere made me inquire about this wonderful event. I found out it was called, "The Choralfest". WOW! I wanted some. Two years later, I found myself driving from Na`alehu to Hilo almost every Sunday (a 90 minute journey one way) for six weeks. The final day of the performance was incredible. If you've never heard of Choralfest, you are definitely missing out on something wonderful. I encourage you to join in the fun and companionship and it's a great learning experience for the ears and the inner self."



Big Island members from Na'alehu, Kamuela, Puna, and Hilo Betsuin pose for a photo with choir conductor, Nola Nahulu, at Choralfest 2012.



more HAWAII DISTRICT news

### Interfaith Services

**Na'alehu:** On Sunday, October 7<sup>th</sup>, a musical Interfaith Service organized by Marge Elwell and members of the Na'alehu community was held at Na'alehu Hongwanji. It was officiated by Rev. Midori Kondo and emceed by Rev. Woodley White. Among the list of performers were Hannah's Halau that danced two hulas, ukulele strumming by Keoki Kahumoku and his students, as well as a chant by the Tibetan Buddhist monks from Wood Valley. The final performance was the group singing of *One Light, One Sun* led by the Puna Hongwanji Choir.

**Hilo Betsuin:** On November 20<sup>th</sup>, The Interfaith Community in Action held its 15<sup>th</sup> Annual Thanksgiving Celebration hosted by Hilo Hongwanji and organized by Jane Iida and her dedicated group of supporters. The program was truly a coming together and sharing of music by members of various faiths in the community. After an *Oli Aloha* by Napua Burke, the standing room only crowd was treated to choral and musical presentations by ten different religious groups. The combined Hilo and Puna Hongwanji choirs led by BJ Soriano ended the service with the singing of *Entrusting Heart*. The congregation joined in with *One Light, One Sun*.

### Other Big Island News

Coming up!! Kona Hongwanji will be hosting Gathafest 2013 on February 24<sup>th</sup>. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend this annual musical event sponsored by the Dharma school teachers.

### MAUI DISTRICT

By Joan Tamori

### Choralfest 2012 Highlight for Wailuku Hongwanji Mission Choir Members

Without a doubt the highlight for the Wailuku Hongwanji Mission Choir in 2012 was attending the fabulous Choralfest in August. Preceding that event however, was the special opportunity to sing during a Sunday service for the Kona Hongwanji BWA members who visited Maui in July. The choir offered two numbers, *Homeward I Go* and *Flying Free*. Freshman dharma school student, Donna Ikeuchi, beautifully accompanied the choir with her flute for *Flying Free* along with the expertise of Dale Sugiki on the organ.



Dale and Donna accompany the choir.

CHORALFEST 2012 welcomed 15 members of the WHM choir to Honolulu to join in with 100 plus temple members of all districts in a massed choir under the direction of Nola Nahulu. As many of our choir members have been to all four Choralfests, they are repeatedly in awe of Nola and her new and creative presentation ideas. The Friday night get-together showcased various music numbers in the social hall. Representing Maui were Mary Tokumaru belting out a powerful rendition of *Over the Rainbow* and Dale Sugiki performing a hula number, *Ku'u Hoa*, and an inspirational *What a Wonderful World* using sign language.

Also in August, the choir resplendent in purple robes, participated in its Obon services by singing *Homeward I Go* and *Flying Free* on both nights with Donna and Dale accompanying the choir once again.

In December, the BWA held its Memorial service honoring members who passed on during the past year. It was especially poignant as one of the four members honored was Janet Okamoto who was a very active member of the choir. The choir sang *Amida's Compassionate Vow* and Florence Tanaka's *Homeward I Go*, in memory of Janet in their hearts.



Choir sings for Janet at the WHM BWA Memorial Service.



WHM Choir sings at Friday & Saturday evening Obon services.



OAHU DISTRICT  
By Gail Taira

# Oahu Celebrates Music at Songfest 2012

Sponsored by the Dharma School Teachers of Oahu, the annual DSTO Songfest was a gathering of friendship and fellowship through music and dance. On October 21, 2012 at Aiea Hongwanji, more than a 100 Dharma School students and their families, temple members, Dharma School teachers and ministers gathered to enjoy the excitement and exuberance as students, teachers and other temple members got up on stage to perform. We were fortunate to have as our guests that morning, Bishop Eric Matsumoto and his daughter, Chika, and Rev. Kevin Kuniyuki from the Buddhist Study Center.

The morning began with a short service followed by the Songfest.

There was truly a wonderful exchange between performers and audience. The Wahiawa students sang and danced to **The Spam Song**, accompanied by the famous "Ukulele Strummers" of Wahiawa Hongwanji. Following that, Kano Hashimoto danced a beautiful hula to the students and Ukulele Strummers rendition of **One Paddle, Two Paddle**. There was so much joy coming from the Wahiawa Hongwanji

Wahiawa Hongwanji students and the famous "Ukulele Strummers"



Pearl City Hongwanji performs Sing!

performers, that I truly felt happy, and so fortunate to be there. Others in the audience must have felt that same energy and sense of joy.

Throughout the morning, all the Dharma students radiated that same joyous energy! Pearl City Hongwanji students sang to **Sing**, with props and dancing, and with help from teachers and parents! They put a smile on everyone's faces! The Okamoto Family from Waipahu Hongwanji performed sign language to **Can You Feel The Love** from the Lion King. This was a case of children teaching parents! It was a great family effort and much enjoyed by everyone.

The Aiea Hongwanji students, teachers and parents did the well known childhood favorites, **Musuunde** and **Chi Chi Pa Pa** and the Mililani Dharma students as well as many members from the Mililani Hongwanji Choir sang **Seasons of Love** from the musical production, "Rent".



Talented Okamoto Family from Waipahu Hongwanji performs sign language to Lion King song.

Ministers Rev. Art Kaufmann of Aiea, Rev. Mary David of Mililani, Rev. Mariko Nishiyama of Pearl City, Rev. Kevin Kuniyuki, Rev. Kojun Hashimoto of Wahiawa, and

Bishop Eric Matsumoto followed with a lively Bon Dance to the **Tanko Bushi!** They were great sports!

The program ended with the group song, **For Good** from the musical "Wicked".

Food is always a great way to end a wonderful morning, so we all had a great bento lunch and spent time visiting with our fellow Dharma friends. It was a wonderful day!



Students and members of Aiea Hongwanji sharing song and love.

## HONOLULU DISTRICT

By Mitsuyo Saito

# Delightful Sounds of Honolulu...

### An Evening with Dr. Jiang Xiaoyan

The "In Celebration of Peace" concert was held on September 20, 2012 at the Honpa Hongwanji Hawaii Betsuin. The Hawaii Betsuin Choir performed a medley of children songs: *Furusato*, *Akatombo*, *Hamabeno Uta* and the Buddhist gatha: *Overflowing Light* accompanied by Dr. Jiang Xiaoyan on the Niko, by Cheryl Sora, on the flute and by Francis Okano on the piano. The Niko is the Chinese violin that is comprised of two strings. It creates rich expressions with a very unique tone. You may visit YouTube at <An Evening with Dr. Jiang Xiaoyan> to view this delightful concert.



Hawaii Betsuin Choir and Dr. Jiang Xiaoyan

### 51<sup>st</sup> Nu'uuanu Interfaith Thanksgiving Service

Every year since 1960, the religious leaders of Nu'uuanu Valley have planned and organized a Thanksgiving Interfaith Service, taking turns in hosting among the varied religious organizations. The Interfaith service is a very unique and enjoyable gathering.

This year, the theme "Spirit of Giving", was depicted beautifully with the Betsuin Choir singing a popular song, *You Can Build A Bridge*.

### Young Buddhist Musical Talents at Music Fest

The young Buddhist musicians recently showcased their musical talents at the Hawaii Betsuin Music Fest making quite an impression to those who attended.



Music Fest features young Buddhist musicians



Brandon Nitta, a junior attending PBA, played *Gunslinger* on his guitar. Brandie Yamamoto of Kauai, President of Hawaii Federation of Jr. YBA, and freshman attending UH Manoa sang *Nada Soso* with guitar accompaniment by Brandon Nitta.

Trumpet player, Alyssa Liem, a senior at Kaiser High School, played *A Trumpeter's Lullaby* accompanied by Francis Okano.

Megan Pascual of the Big Island, and a second year student of music at UH Manoa played *Gavotte* by Bach and *Gigue from Sonata D minor*. Cheryl Sora from Kauai, a member of



HHHB's BWA and working at Tori Richard, played *Gavotte* on the flute and accompanied by Francis Okano on the piano. The Choir sang, *River Song* and *Gratefulness (II)* with the instruments joining in.



Hawaii Betsuin Choir sings at Bodhi Day Service held at Higashi Hongwanji Mission.

Music is a wonderful way to spread the teaching of the Dharma. The choir members enjoy singing impressively and harmoniously for many occasions.



more HONOLULU DISTRICT news

# Jikoen Choir News

The Jikoen choir, although small in number, continues to learn new gathas, sing during special services and leads the congregation in singing during regular services. The choir sends a special thank you to Mrs. Mitsuyo Saito for inviting us to join the Hawaii Betsuin choir whenever there is a special event. It is a wonderful experience to join a full choir with four-part singing.

Participating in the 2012 Choralfest was an exhilarating experience singing with over 100 choir members from all over the state and the mainland.

It was one of our highlights this past year. We also enjoyed relaxing at Natsunoya Tea House during our annual party. One of the enjoyable games was ōName That Gathaō. It was amazing that it was not easy to identify titles of gathas by the music alone.

We look forward to another exciting year. Thank you, Mrs. Chihoko Yosemite, for arranging our schedule for the year and Janet Sasaki for taking care of all clerical matters. Also, thank you, to Rev. Nishiyama and Rev. Urasaki for joining us upon request during some of the special services.



You can now see CHORALFEST 2012 on YouTube via the following Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii website address:  
[http://hongwanjihawaii.com/news\\_events/index.html](http://hongwanjihawaii.com/news_events/index.html)  
Or  
go to the Hongwanji website and click on News & Events, Honpa Hongwanji Choralfest 2012



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