

Musical Notes

A PUBLICATION OF THE HONPA HONGWANJI MISSION OF HAWAII OFFICE OF BUDDHIST EDUCATION MUSIC COMMITTEE



JULY 2014



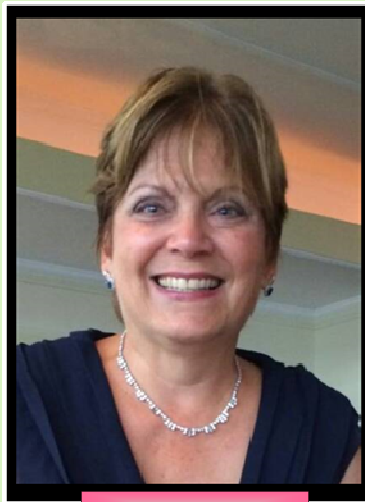
The Big Island's Big Talent: *BJ Soriano*

By Ethel Miyashiro



Born and raised in Hilo and Pahala on Hawaii island, BJ Soriano is truly a local girl who comes with tremendous talent. In 2001 she moved to Washington and returned after what she says was a short year because she realized that her heart truly belonged in Hilo.

Having been brought up a Protestant, as an adult she began to search for a religion more in line with her philosophies. She began having a few discussions about Buddhism with a friend and came more open to learning dhist meant. One day out of Hongwanji Mission where warm wishes that she demonstrated, she asked Rev. Mmember. Rev. Kondo took questions about Buddhism BJ then started to bring her too, and they quickly embraced Amida Buddha's compassion. "New Music Roundup" gatha inspired, but unsure as to *Amida's Guide to Life* and was selected as one of the



BJ Soriano

brought her encouraged her to continue to write as an expression of her love for the Buddha and the teachings. There had been no melody to the lyrics at the time, but after about a year, the melody materialized in her mind and enabled her to share the gatha in musical form.

Writing gathas has helped her to remember the teachings of the Buddha, and she firmly believes that music is the thread that weaves us through our daily lives. Being able to remember the words to the gathas that we sing can help us to 'think pure and beautiful thoughts, to say pure and beautiful words and to do pure and beautiful deeds...' Jennifer Taira's musical arrangement of *The Golden Chain of Love*, are words she sings often especially when she is having a horrible day or trying to calm bad thoughts.

Love for music was instilled in BJ at a young age. She and her mother would sing Hawaiian melodies and she quickly learned that singing and playing her ukulele brought her peace and harmony. As a seventh grader at Waiakea Intermediate School, she began to focus on her ability to make the ukulele sing. While not having any formal music training, she learned to play the guitar,

(continued on page 3)

through these discussions about what living as a Buddhist the blue, she attended Hilo she was greeted with so many dori Kondo about becoming a the time to answer her deep and Jodo Shinshu teachings. son Dustin to Dharma School braced and were embraced by sion. In 2003, there was a writing contest. Having been how, she wrote a gatha titled entered it in the contest. It winners, and the joy it

WRITING GATHAS HAS HELPED HER TO REMEMBER THE TEACHINGS OF THE BUDDHA, AND SHE FIRMLY BELIEVES THAT MUSIC IS THE THREAD THAT WEAVES US THROUGH OUR DAILY LIVES.

Music Editorial

BY FRANCIS OKANO

"THE POINT, OF COURSE, IS NOT THAT GATHAS CANNOT BE "IMPROVED". THE QUESTION IS, RATHER, WHO ARE WE TO "IMPROVE" THEM? WHERE PEOPLE DIFFER WIDELY IN TASTES AND PREFERENCES, WHO ELSE BUT THE COMPOSER HAS THE LEGITIMACY TO DECIDE HOW TO EXPRESS HER INSIGHTS?"



About the time I joined the Hawaii Betsuin Choir (Richard Nixon was then President), I happened to hear how a set of delightful English gathas for children, composed by talented ministers' wives in California post-World-War-II, was re-arranged by a famous composer in Japan at Hawaii Kyodan's request. When nine re-arrangements appeared in *Praises of the Buddha* (1962), I was told, these songs' composers were astonished and angered by the high-handed treatment of their creations. The copyright infringement was "corrected" when Hawaii and BCA jointly published the original scores, all, in a new gatha book, *Buddhist Services and Gathas for Children* (1970).

So, it was almost *deja vu* when I learned that a beautiful service book, published in 2013 by a leading BCA temple, contained gathas that were altered – some with music re-arrangements, others with lyrics and title changes. Among the obvious ones were two delightful post-War songs mentioned earlier and two singable translations from Hawaii's *Praises of the*

NO CHANGE!

Buddha (1990). I don't know about the former, but we were not consulted about the latter. However the breach arose – and how little informed we seem to be about copyright -- I was not happy.

The point, of course, is not that gathas cannot be "improved". The question is, rather, who are we to "improve" them? Where people differ widely in tastes and preferences, who else but the composer has the legitimacy to decide how to express her insights? While I grant that one may exercise artistic license in performances, most will agree that in-house changes to the score resulting from this liberty should never be published unless appropriate steps are taken. Doesn't a publication, after all, serve as an authentic record of gatha authorship for posterity?

If anyone thinks artists are not fiercely protective of their work, consider that the writer J.D. Salinger was said to have walked out forever on his best friend when the friend, an editor at the *New Yorker*, having promised to change not a single word of Salinger's short story, missed

a subordinate's editing of the title. A Hawaii musician (in the 1950s) offered and then withdrew a contribution of gathas to the temple when he learned of proposed "revisions." The temple cannot have it both ways -- encourage original compositions on the one hand and leave them fair game for future self-anointed "revisers" on the other. If temples did so routinely, new gathas would vanish in an instant – why write them when all you get in return is heartache? That they haven't could suggest most temples know not to infringe upon artists' copyright.

As inevitable as the legal route may be, perhaps if the Hongwanji in Hawaii, the Mainland, and Canada were to have common sense guidelines for the proper use of gathas for future publications, such an understanding may go far to prevent misunderstandings. Why? Simply because such an understanding would *have* to have at its core music's golden rule -- treat others' music the way you would have others treat your music.



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"Musical Notes" is published biannually by the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii,
Office of Buddhist Education Music Committee.

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Soriano—continued from page 1

played the clarinet and alto clarinet in the school band for six years, and took voice lessons. BJ has sung many solos and duets in choirs as well as church. These days her favorite person to sing by her side is her son, Dustin, who also joins her in creating many lively musical arrangements.

Currently she trying to write more songs, both contemporary and gathas, when she feels the inspiration. Recently HHMH provided a grant through the Propagation Grant Committee to have nine of the gathas she has penned to be arranged into a keyboard score. The project has been newly completed and CD's with musical scores have been distributed to all the Hongwanji temples. This will allow temples to learn and sing the gathas and share her messages. BJ worked with Michael Springer, from MOS Music Studios, LLC, who did all the arrangements and to whom she and all of us express our deepest gratitude.



BJ and son, Dustin

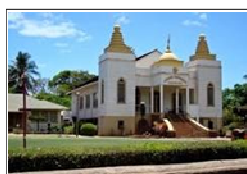
BJ says she has been fortunate to share gatha writing, gatha learning, ukulele, arts and crafts with the Dharma School children at San Francisco Buddhist Church, which she calls her second home, for the last four to five years. I think the children are fortunate to have such a dynamic person in their lives. BJ also serves as Hilo Betsuin's Choir Director, one of the most joyful and musical growing experiences of her life. She thoroughly enjoys the members of the temple's choir; they ALL share a special bond. BJ also graciously extends her aloha and welcomes the Puna Hongwanji Mission music family which joins her when opportunities arise. BJ's energy extends to the community where she is currently involved with Big Brothers Big Sisters as a member of the Big Island's Regional Board. She is now or has been involved in a number of community organizations in different capacities such as the American Cancer Society, Lehua Jaycees, Waiakea Intermediate School PTA Boards, HGEA, and the State HHMH Music Committee among others. And as this article is being written, "Auntie BJ" is being welcomed back to the Department of Parks and Recreation's Culture and Education Section with her "Beginning Ukulele Class". To celebrate her return they are hosting an Ukulele Reunion inviting all of BJ's estimated 500 former students to kanikapila with her.

So, does she have any spare time? Well, not if you consider learning to play the piano and setting goals to one day play for a dinner crowd, at a local eatery. We are truly grateful to have BJ share her musical talents and her wonderful persona with us throughout the community and the Hawaii Kyodan.



GATHA TRANSLATIONS UPDATE

Following the retirement at the end of 2013 of its chairperson, Mitsuyo Saito, the Translation Subcommittee met on May 23 to plan an agenda for the rest of 2014. Among candidate gathas for translation are **Hotokesama wa, Yurusareshi, Anata to deatte, Aokusa wa,** and **Inochi kagayaite**. Word was received that Hawaii Betsuin has put together a new 3-ring booklet of the seven translated singable gathas distributed in December 2013.



THE SONGFEST
WAS A BLAST!
TEMPLES CAME
PREPARED WITH A
VARIETY OF
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TO SHARE WITH
ALL!



It's Fujimatsuri Time!

The FUJIMATSURI and Gotan-E service commemorates the birthdate of Shinran Shonin, the founder of Jodo Shinshu Buddhism. On May 18, 2014, temple members from near and far joyously gathered to join host temple, Lahaina Hongwanji Mission, in welcoming the Fujimatsuri Celebration unique to the island of Maui. Sunny skies and faces greeted everyone at Lahaina's historical and religious jewel boasting its twin Indian-style stupa building. If you are visiting Lahaina, it is a must see for its exterior as well as quaint interior.

Bishop Eric Matsumoto, a surprise special guest, graced the congregation with his presence at the annual event. The schedule commenced with refreshments in the patio, the service, followed by the SongFest, a brief fun-filled quiz bowl and an outstanding lunch prepared by the women and men of LHM.

The **SONGFEST** was a blast! Temples came prepared with a variety of songs/gathas to share with all!

LAHAINA's group impressed with **Nembutsu in Our Lives**, with lyrics adapted by Earl Zaan to the tune, **Kawa no Nagare no You ni**. Talented Sylvia Neizman had them rapping and moving to the **Buddha, Dharma, Sangha Rap** created by her.

KAHULUI's group sang with ukulele accompaniment and wowed everyone with **Splendor of an Evening Sky** and **Becoming Free**.

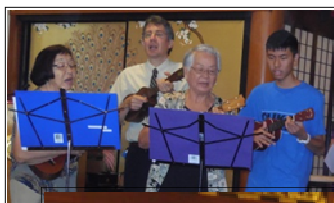
MAKAWAO's group sang beautiful renditions of **On This Morn** and **The Wondrous Gift of Peace**.

WAILUKU's group introduced a former Choralfest gatha, **Within the Light**, honoring Shinran Shonin on his special day. Temple members joined the WHM choir for BJ Soriano's **Listen to Amida With Your Heart** with dharma school students and parents accompanying on the ukulele.

An impromptu number was presented by the ministers, Rev. Ai Hironaka, Rev. Richard Tennes, Rev. Shinkai Murakami, and Bishop Eric Matsumoto. Great job at last minute's notice!



MINISTERS and BISHOP!



KAHULUI!



MAKAWAO!



LAHAINA!



WAILUKU!

Oahu District

By Gail Taira



Surprise Highlight at Oahu Songfest

On May 4, 2014, at Waipahu Hongwanji, dharma school students, teachers, and temple members gathered at Waipahu Hongwanji for the Oahu District Songfest. The morning began with a short service, followed by musical presentations from Waipahu, Mililani, Wahiawa, and Pearl City Dharma schools. The surprise highlight of the day was a special presentation by the Oahu ministers, starring Rev. Hashimoto and Rev. Okamoto as Queen Elsa and Anna from the hit movie, "Frozen". Everyone had a great time! A delicious bento lunch was served and enjoyed by everyone who attended!



Wahiawa Hongwanji Dharma School and Ukulele Strummers

THE SURPRISE
HIGHLIGHT OF THE
DAY WAS A SPECIAL
PRESENTATION BY
THE OAHU
MINISTERS,
STARRING REV.
HASHIMOTO AND
REV. OKAMOTO AS
QUEEN ELSA AND
ANNA FROM THE
HIT MOVIE,
"FROZEN".



Mililani Hongwanji Dharma School Students



Honolulu District

By Wendie Yumori

Hawai'i Betsuin Choir

New Co-Directors of the Betsuin Choir, Mari Murakami and Megan Pascual, have been applying themselves admirably to the task of filling Mrs. Saito's shoes! It is to Mari and Megan's credit that they have been able to work out their Choir schedule so smoothly. During the busy month of April, for example, Co-Director Mari led the practices preparing Choir members to sing **Amida's Smile** and **To Live** for Hawaii Buddhist Council's Buddha Day service on April 6 and **Say Namō Amida Butsu** for Betsuin's Hanamatsuri service on April 13. Under Mari's direction, the Choir's singing of these lovely prelude gathas enhanced the beauty and joy of these celebratory services.



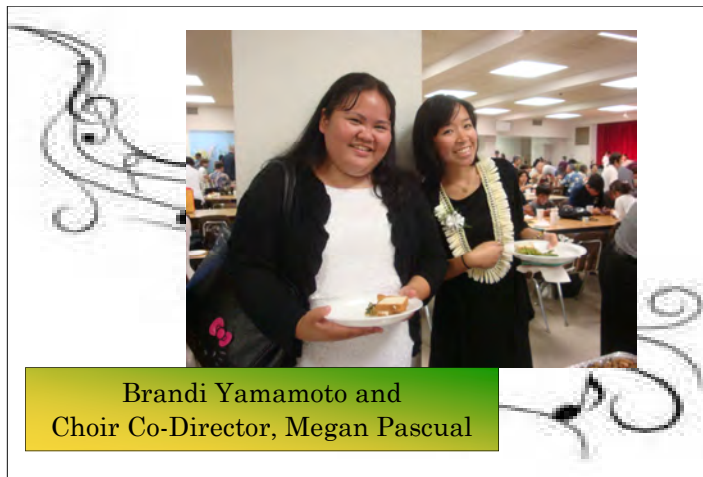
Co-Director Mari Murakami
at HBC Buddha Day



Honolulu District Combined Hongwanji Choir

Combined Hongwanji Choir

Co-Director Megan, in the meantime, was gearing up for Honolulu District's April 27 service to commemorate the 125th Anniversary of the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii. It was Megan's task to prepare the Combined Hongwanji Choir, comprised of participants from Betsuin, Jikoen, Kailua, and Moiliili Hongwanji, to sing for this special 125th Anniversary Service at Hawaii Betsuin. During practices, Megan conducted almost 40 singers, many of whom were three times her age! The morning of April 27, all were prepared and calm as Gov. Neil Abercrombie took his seat in the front row. Megan gave the cue to begin and the voices of the Combined Hongwanji Choir blended beautifully in the inspired singing of **Lullaby for Children of the World** (with Mari's violin accompaniment), **Peace Begins With Me**, and **Splendor of an Evening Sky**. Later in the program, Brandi Yamamoto offered a touching solo of **There You'll Be**, a song of remembrance and thanks. Memories of uplifting music lingered long after the close of this wonderful service.



Brandi Yamamoto and
Choir Co-Director, Megan Pascual

Hawaii District

By Ethel Miyashiro

Hawaii Island's Annual Gathafest

Hosted by: Honokaa, Kamuela, Kohala & Paauilo Hongwanji Dharma Schools

On a beautiful Sunday in February, the 40th Annual **Gathafest** participants gathered in scenic Honokaa at the Honokaa Hongwanji Hall for a morning of fellowship and to spread the teachings of the Dharma through music.

As we were reminded by an excerpt from the *Praises of the Buddha*, that was printed on the program: "As used to-day, the term gatha simply means verse or song. In the early part of the present century, English-speaking Buddhists in Hawaii and abroad composed verses and melodies which were generally called 'gathas'. Today, in the English-speaking Hongwanji, the word 'gatha' refers to primarily songs express-

ing heartfelt Buddhist sentiments written in the Western musical style."

To celebrate the Dharma in a multi-generational way, Gathafest has become a way of sharing a variety of songs that convey the Buddha's teachings.

The success of the morning's program was measured in the smiles of everyone and the overall feeling of oneness and joy with each temple's unique presentations.

The Big Island's Gathafest is held annually on the last Sunday of February and we invite anyone wishing to enjoy the Buddha's message through song to attend.

Kona singing *That's the Jodo Shinshu Way* with heartfelt expression



A song dedicated to Nelson Mandela *Turn This World Around* (for the children) performed by Puna



United Jr. YBA definitely having fun with their song, *Roar*



Ministers led by Rimban Soga, sing gatha classics, *NonoSama* and *Quest of Life*



Hilo Betsuin led by BJ Soriano singing the beautiful *The Golden Chain of Love*



Honokaa's Jazz Band with Miles Okumura & the Black and White choral group singing *Everlasting Light* and *500 Miles*



Kamuela's number *May All the Children* beautifully adapted to American Sign Language and performed with grace and reverence



Paauilo's enthusiastic group singing *All Life is One* with smiles on their faces



Kauai District

By Gladys Fujiuchi

IN JOYFUL HARMONY

The Lihue Hongwanji Mission choir and friends participated in the annual Hanamatsuri Service held at Kauai Soto Zen Temple on April 6, 2014. Many of the members are new to the choir. We have lost a whole generation of singers who have moved on to a better place.



We sang **Floral Festival** and **Happy Buddha Day** using tambourines to accompany us, inviting the congregation to join our voices and the voices of the Hawaii Betsuin choir on CD in joyful harmony.

CHORALFEST 2014 IN SEPTEMBER

A robust Choralfest 2014 is shaping up as the reply to the question hanging in the air after Choralfest 2012 – “when’s the next one?” Scheduled for an all-afternoon rehearsal plus evening entertainment on Saturday, September 27, and the Music Service performance on Sunday, September 28, 2014, at the Hawaii Betsuin, the event will feature a 160-voice choir conducted by Hongwanji’s Living Treasure, Nola Nahulu. For the first time, a contingent of 40 singers from three choirs in Japan will make this the first international Hawaii choralfest ever!

The festival choir will premiere a choral gatha, **Buddha’s Great Light**, composed by Jennifer Taira to lyrics by Carrie Kawamoto, who are both members of Mililani Hongwanji. Rounding out the selections are **Cosmos Flower**, **Lullaby for Children of the World**, **Each Day Anew**, and **Amida’s Compassionate Vow**, beautiful choral arrangements all by the Honzan Music Department and translated into singable English by the Hawaii Kyodan Translation Subcommittee.

If the past four Choralfests are any indication, the upcoming Sunday morning Music Service, September 28, at 10:00 am at Hawaii Betsuin, will be a moving experience you will not want to miss! Come and see for yourself!