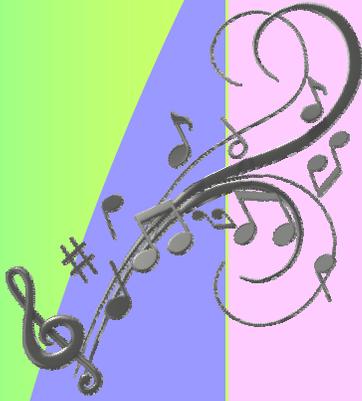




MUSICIANS



NORIYO MORIKUBO: Temple Organist

By Francis Okano

At Moiliili Hongwanji's centennial commemorative banquet in 2006, those in attendance well remember being serenaded beautifully by Ernie Morikubo, his smooth guitar improvisations and mellow bass filling the hall. As fortunate as Moiliili Hongwanji is to be able to enjoy Ernie's talents, it is even more fortunate that it has younger sister Noriyo as the bedrock of temple music in her position as principal organist.

Noriyo Morikubo has, since her early teens, provided organ music cheerfully and consistently to more than a generation of temple-goers at Moiliili. If her service over a span of almost five decades has seemed low-profile, it is partly the nature of the job -- organists are more heard than seen, to such a degree that, for a while, they even toiled from behind a bamboo screen!

How did this remarkable woman become a temple organist? The story begins in Hiroshima, Japan, where Noriyo was born the third child in a family of three sons and a daughter. Noriyo's father, Michio, a pillar of Moiliili Hongwanji in his day, was born in Hawaii but was sent to Japan after the ninth grade to receive a proper Japanese high school education, a respectable practice among Nisei. Noriyo's mother, Michiko, was a citizen of Kudamatsu, Yamaguchi Prefecture, Japan. When Noriyo turned two, the family relocated to Hawaii, enabling father Michio to take over the family tailoring business, Pacific Woolen, Ltd., from his father. The move to Honolulu also meant that Noriyo and her brothers, who were accustomed to spoken Japanese until then, had to learn English and retain Japanese comprehension at home.

Since parents and grandparents were active members of Moiliili Hongwanji, Noriyo was brought to temple even as a toddler. She remembers the original wooden structure that was Moiliili Hongwanji, facing the Moiliili Community Center, before the present concrete building fronting University Avenue occupied the grounds in 1961.

At eight years of age, Noriyo began piano lessons. She thrived under the tutelage of her first teacher, Annette Hirai, who encouraged Noriyo's love of piano music. The special bond between teacher and pupil was all too sadly short-lived, however. To this day, Noriyo remembers crying when Miss Hirai left the islands upon marriage. Piano lessons never felt the same since. Not easily discouraged, Noriyo continued with the Curtis Grimes Piano Studio in Moiliili until age fourteen.

When Noriyo was thirteen, a time when Noriyo's father served on the Moiliili Hongwanji board, she recalls that four young girls, including herself, were asked to form a pool of prospective temple organists. These piano students received instruction from then-temple-organist, Kay Tokunaga, who faced a growing piano teaching career. Noriyo remembers Kay's advice that in organ playing, unlike in piano playing, it is important to always "connect the notes with

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CHORALFEST “PROGRAM NOTES”

By Francis Okano

At symphony concerts, I find reading the Program Notes an easy way to learn about the works to be performed. They help me better appreciate the music I’m about to hear. One day, it struck me -- why not “describe” the choral selections of the upcoming Choralfest 2016? However short the introductions, they might help people anticipate and enjoy the songs better. And so, without further ado, here is my mini -“Program Notes” for the five choral gathas of the Music Service in September:

Where, Oh, Where? (Hotokesama wa): In a gatha titled *Inochi (Life)*, the lyrics assert passionately that the Buddha surely dwells within the life of the tiny flower, the field bird, and the drop of dew. And many are the references in the sutras -- as well as in the gatha, *Seiya (Splendor of an Evening Sky)* -- to the Buddhas numbering as countless as the sands of the Ganges. Where then, to a child’s eye, is a single Buddha to be found? *Where, Oh, Where?* replies, with elegance and a touch of whimsy, that the Buddha is found in nature that easily surrounds you – the spring cherry tree, summer riverbank, autumn clouds, and winter snow flakes. Equally is Buddha found (in verse two) in the warm love that surrounds you – grandpa’s bushy brows, grandma’s twinkling eyes, father’s mighty chest, and mother’s caring hands. A sprightly and happy tune tells that the Buddha, without your knowing, is indeed all around you, sheltering you.

Entrusting Heart (Marui kokoro): As if in a dream, a tender melody brings imagery of how a heart that entrusts in Amida cannot help but nurture “kind, gentle words” like “flowers...of sweetest scent”, spread goodwill like a “joyful song of life”, and launch “a bridge of hope” linking man to man and “reaching out to tomorrow!” In its ethereal quality, the music may be said to suggest a vision of the Pure Land.

Touched by Kindness (Yasashisa ni deattara): We are told in this gatha that while the complexion of our lives may often change – as when we are “touched by kindness,” or by “loneliness”, or by “pain” – responding with care -- as by sharing the kindness with others, or by reaching out to friends, or by moving forward with understanding -- makes all the difference in the world. After opening statements, the two voices appear to weave a floral lei (spoken of in the second verse) in the middle section before the gatha ends happily on a note of confidence.

How Happy I Am! (Go-on ureshiya): This poem by the *myokonin* Saichi Asahara, a lay Jodo Shinshu master, literally shouts the ecstasy of being embraced as one with Amida. A repeated melody, deeply probing, grows into joyful wonder, against the backdrop of an insistent rolling cadence resembling the ebb and flow of the tides that are mentioned in verse two. As “insep’rable as are sea and tide,” Asahara proclaims, “Mida, we are one not two,... / All beings...are bound one with you.” While exploring the expressive minor mode, the piece concludes affirmatively in the major.

Buddha’s Great Light: In this gatha, we progress in three verses from trial (“times of difficulty”) through effort (“times of gratitude”) to acceptance (“hands of heart in gassho’). As we “say Namu Amida Butsu” through each stage, we are reminded that we are ever in the “embrace of Buddha’s Great Light.” Music sweeps us through the verses, flowing with mounting intensity to a climax, before subsiding to the calm of the coda’s Nembutsu.



(Morikubo: continued from page 1)



Noriyo with husband Jerrold
and daughter Kayo

your fingers.” It was a lesson Noriyo learned well, for to witness Noriyo’s hands at the keyboard is to see how deftly she executes finger substitution on the keys for legato effect. After a few lessons, the four girls formed a temple-organ-playing rotation that continued through much of their high school and college years.

Graduation from the University of Hawaii put Noriyo’s organ playing on hold while she took the opportunity to spend a year in Japan. She decided to deepen her appreciation of her roots by taking classes in Tokyo, visiting relatives in Hiroshima and Yamaguchi, and exploring exotic sites in Hokkaido and Nagano. By the time she returned to Hawaii, organ playing at Moiliili Hongwanji had devolved by attrition to then-minister’s wife, Sumi Makino. It must have seemed a blessing to Mrs. Makino, therefore, when she saw Noriyo at service one day. Mrs. Makino asked Noriyo if she would kindly resume the organ. Noriyo agreed. And the rest, as they say, is history.... Noriyo has made temple music a priority ever since, playing in rotation with Mrs. Makino at first and as sole organist later.

Since organ-playing has been voluntary, when asked how she felt “giving up” her Sunday mornings to the organ – as opposed to simply catching a few more winks or soaking up sun and surf -- Noriyo replies she feels lucky she has had the opportunity to play the organ, a privilege indeed granted only a few. She counts many benefits in hindsight. “The experience has kept me in the temple and has shaped who I am,” she says. “Being organist is part of my identity, and I’m finding the alternatives not as attractive,” she asserts. Though she admits some of the sermons are earfuls, she has heard the message, “as if by osmosis,” finding it a “neat” reward of her Sunday mornings. On a practical note, Noriyo wryly admits she is totally OK to receive little pressure, as organist, to serve in other capacities at temple! Musically speaking, preparing for and playing the organ every week, Noriyo says, “has kept me at the keyboard and in music all these years.” Noriyo acknowledges, above all, that her devotion to temple music owes much to the abiding influences in her life – her parents and family, the temple, her teachers.

Some of Noriyo’s favorite gathas are such children’s delights as *Long Ago in India* and *It’s Raining*, by Jane Imamura. When asked the future direction of temple music, Noriyo suggests that the Hongwanji should look to diversify gathas, both as to type and delivery. Gathas, she believes, could well incorporate more instruments -- guitar, ukulele, woodwinds, drums. It should involve more people, lessening the gulf between congregation and musicians. Quoting former Moiliili minister Rev. Earl Ikeda that “music has the power to bring people together,” Noriyo feels “we should create music that resonates with all peoples.”

Noriyo can be found during the workweek at Pacific Woolen, Ltd., in Honolulu, busy managing operations with her brother Ernest. At home, Noriyo and her husband, Dr. Jerrold Brown, a practicing psychologist, are proud parents of daughter Kayo, who graduated from the University of Hawaii in history and psychology and currently works in Seattle – and who has inherited mother’s and uncle’s musical talents. Noriyo’s interests include cooking, reading, traveling (for later), and singing. It goes without saying that the Moiliili Hongwanji sangha is truly fortunate for Noriyo’s *dana* of temple music every Sunday.



Music is Community

By Laurie Rubin



When I sit beside my mom in the car, she tears up every time the first notes of *Unchained Melody* play on the oldies station. It was the song sung by the ghosts of heart-broken girls' first loves who were tragically killed in the Vietnam War.

For me, there's nothing like hearing *REM* to bring back the romantic fragrance of balmy summer nights before my first kiss. Music makes such a strong impression on a person that our bodies and minds can physically recall feelings, smells, exact emotions we experienced that have been long forgotten. Every right of passage can be linked to a song, even if it's simply one we heard in the background. Because music is at the center of our social universe, it is the force that brings communities together. When we stop to think about it, the music we are most influenced by is from our formative years, when we were experiencing the majority of our "firsts".

Sadly, we are in great danger of losing the important communities fostered by the Hongwanji. We often hear that the amount of active 20 somethings is dwindling, and that the dharma schools are dropping drastically in enrollment. As a musician who actively engages with young people through the performing arts, I began to think of ways in which we could help to turn this situation around. I truly believe the answer lies in music.

In services, we are asked to turn the pages of our gathas books to a song whose lyrics most closely reflect the dharma message of the delivering reverend. We sing the songs obligingly, but are we actually connecting to them? Many of the gathas were written by Christian writers who were greatly influenced by hymns. In more recent years, Buddhist songwriters have created new gathas. Even so however, the songs still seem to stay within a similar style.

I believe that it is time for Jodo Shinshu Buddhists to find their unique voice, and to make young people motivated and excited to come to church every Sunday. When I think about the song that has moved me most at church, I think of *Flying Free*, by Don Besig, with its simply arpeggiated piano accompaniment and flute obbligato. While *Flying Free*, isn't necessarily a "Buddhist song," why do all gathas have to specifically be so to share a Buddhist message? Why can't we, for example, sing a poignant Simon and Garfunkel song, or something more current by Ed Sheeran? If we show the youth of today that we care enough about them to invest in what they're interested in, the likelihood of their participation and return investment would be much greater.

We want the messages our reverends choose with care to resonate deeply with our children. We want church on Sunday to be an event in the week they look forward to. We want them to imagine themselves sharing the church experience with their children. Music can be the bridge that connects our youth to church and brings them back into the community.

One of the most beautiful aspects to Buddhism is the notion that we should embrace change. This being the case, we should constantly be changing the musical fabric of Buddhism to keep it current. At Choralfest, efforts should be made to put a choir together comprised of youth from Oahu and the neighboring islands. In our individual church Hongwanjis, we should source arrangements of poignant classical, folk, or pop songs for members to play on guitar, perhaps cello, flute, clarinet, etc. If you know of members with children, relatives, or friends who play various instruments, reach out to them and ask them to play in services. Finally, music leaders at the Hongwanji should always be asking themselves what the purpose of this music is, and how effective it is at touching the people around us. We hear our reverends speaking about interdependence, and music is a way to achieve this because we all contribute to the experience, whether as an instrumentalist or a person who sings along.

Hawaii District by Rev. Shinji Kawagoe

"ONENESS"

On February 28, Sunday, we got together for Gathafest. Every year we rotate the location and this year it was held at Papaikou Hongwanji.

As Jodo Shinshu became established, the distinction between prose and poetry was generally denoted by Dokkyo (読経) and Shomyo (声明).

Dokkyo referred to sutra chanting and Shomyo to “radiant” vocal music, which included both gathas (gemon) and praises(wasan), which are among the literary works of Shinran Shonin.

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



I Am the Earth by Hilo Betsuin members

“gatha” refers primarily to songs expressing heartfelt Buddhist sentiments written in the Western musical style.

This year, seven groups (including a ministers’ group) and one individual, performed as representatives from each Hongwanji temple on Hawaii Island. Some temples with small memberships got together to make one group. Hongwanji members have so much talent for music as some groups wrote lyrics with Buddhist

meanings for existing music. Therefore, it is a good way to listen to the Buddha-Dharma through well-known music. It seems that regardless of age, we could all experience a rewarding and enjoyable time through music.



Nembutsu Yesterday by Tracy Tsuha, representative from Honomu Hongwanji



The Wondrous Gift of Peace and Sambo no On by Hawaii District Ministers

Buddhism says “Oneness”. Our founder, Shinran Shonin, wrote in his book that, “The true dharma, the ultimate reality, is oneness, and yet in saving beings and benefiting people, one B u d - d h a ’ s g r e a t

vows differ from another’s.” Everyone comes from different cultural backgrounds, thoughts and mind. However this time, at Papaikou Hongwanji, there was “Oneness” through music regardless of nationality, gender and age. Our “Gathafest” gathering is a wonderful occasion for us to realize the ultimate value of truth, which we are living now. In Gassho.



Participants gather for Gathafest at Papaikou Hongwanji.



My Sisters and Brothers by Paauilo Hongwanji members and Rev. Furusawa on drums

Maui District by Joan Tamori



Fujimatsuri Songfest Features BJ Soriano Gathas

BJ Soriano's singable gathas for local congregations were highlighted at the Maui district annual Fujimatsuri (Wisteria Festival) held at hosting temple, Makawao Hongwanji Mission, on May 15, 2016. Hongwanji members from Lahaina, Kahului, and Wailuku joined Makawao's members at their beautiful upcountry temple. It was a glorious day for a gathering celebrating Shinran Shonin's birthday which was filled with worthwhile and fun activities for both young and old. The festivities commenced with a morning



As one, Lahaina and Makawao members sing *Together As One*.



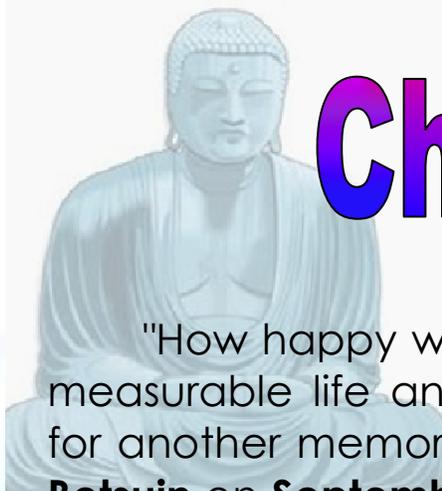
Kahului members gaily share *Hands Together in Gassho!*

service conducted by resident minister, Rev. William Masuda, who was accompanied by Rev. Richard Tennes of Kahului, Rev. Ai Hironaka of Lahaina, and Rev. Shinkai Murakami of Wailuku. Rev. Masuda elicited smiles and laughter amongst congregation members as he encouraged audience participation during his sermon. Members of the various Hongwanjis grew excited awaiting their turns in the SongFest following the service. First up were Wailuku choir and temple members accompanied by Florence Tanaka's Ukulele Strummers as they joyously sang *Amida's Our Horizon*. Kahului Hongwanji members then gathered quickly to share *Hands Together in Gassho*, doing a great job as well. Lastly, a huge group was formed by Lahaina and Makawao temples who together, (and appropriately) sang, *Together As One*. One could tell that all temple members practiced diligently for this day as they shared the dharma joyfully through song! (You would have been proud of us, BJ!)

For fellowship and relaxation, everyone gathered in the social hall for an assortment of games - Scrabble, Go, Hanafuda, Mah-jongg, etc., and members even practiced dancing for Obon while children were outdoors enjoying a game of kickball! A most scrumptious lunch was served topping off an excellent event hosted by Makawao Hongwanji (known for its famous pickled peaches!)



Wailuku members sing *Amida's Our Horizon* accompanied by the WHM Ukulele Strummers.



Choralfest 2016

"How happy we are" to be surrounded by Amida's immeasurable life and light as we again prepare ourselves for another memorable **CHORALFEST** to be held at **Hawaii Betsuin** on **September 24 to 25, 2016!** Through gathas with captivating melodies, approximately 100 singers from near and far will be gathering as one to share the joyous dharma. **Nola Nahulu**, choir conductor extraordinaire, will have participants enthused and focused throughout the process culminating with a presentation on **Sunday morning. Please join us for this music service at 10:00 a.m. in the Hondo to experience a celebration of the Buddha-dharma!** (Read Francis Okano's Music Editorial on page 2 for "program notes" on choral selections.)

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