

Musical Notes



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Issue

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Lihue Hongwanji Members “Let Your Love Show”

By Gladys Fujiuchi



Lihue Hongwanji members sing Debbie Kubota's gatha *Let Your Love Show* which was a lovely follow-up to Rev. Takahashi's Dharma talk.

Learning the many new and translated gathas have set the program for us on Kauai musically, as we try to incorporate new music into our services, and increase our repertoire of temple music. At Sunday services, our greeter would welcome each church goer with a sheet of music that was on the program. Finally, after years of distributing and collecting each sheet after service, LHM members finally put them all together in what is now our “New and Translated” gatha folder. The previous book which was printed in 1999 and referred to as the “New Gatha book” for the longest time has now been replaced by the latest collection of music. I must admit though, that several gathas escaped being included, though not intentionally.

The collection consists of 13 gathas by BJ Soriano, six gathas by Debbie Kubota, two gathas by Lily Horio, and gathas translated throughout the years by the Music Committee and made familiar by the Choralfests. We use CD's to accompany our singing of the gathas when available. We will try to integrate the ukulele more to accompany gathas.

With the passing of time, Lihue's numbers have diminished until we no longer have a choir. But now, everyone in the congregation gets to learn the gathas together which brings more music opportunities into services.

A few weeks ago Lihue Hongwanji Mission was visited by Debbie and Alan Kubota, composers of the recent new gathas *Let Your Love Show*, *Living Gratefully*, *Living the Golden Chain*, *It All Starts With You*, *The Life You Lead*, and *Peace is a Seed*. This seemed the most opportune time for us to start to learn their new gathas, now that our frantic business of Bon Dance is over. The first gatha we undertook was *Let Your Love Show*, which has a very pretty, lilting melody and thoughtful lyrics.

It was a perfect follow up to Sensei Takahashi's Dharma talk about a mother's love for her troubled son who conveyed her love by repeating, “ I really love you. You are my treasure and I'm always on your side”.



Music Editorial

Can We Play Christian Music In A Buddhist Service?

By Francis Okano

Do temple organists ask themselves what is appropriate music for preludes and post-ludes? I do. Since the Hongwanji finds itself short on volumes – let alone a tradition -- of organ music, I should think questions would arise: Do we play only from the gatha book? Can we play popular songs or classical numbers? And, last, can we play Christian music in a Buddhist service? Such questions could have lurked the very day Bishop Emyo Imamura installed a pipe organ in the newly dedicated Hawaii Betsuin nearly a century ago.



Even as a Medicare recipient, I can't say I know what was played at Hawaii Betsuin back then. The frayed liturgical organ scores at the organ loft suggest, however, that at some point organists resorted to these for incidental music, as I do today. Before some services, also, I have heard soothing strains from local ukulele, Chinese *erhu*, voice, or piano piped in on CD. Although I am not inclined personally toward Christian song per se (say, *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring* by Bach) as preludes, the question persists: are certain beautiful Christian pieces permissible in our westernized temples?

One answer was heard at a recent joint Hanamatsuri Service at the Jodo Mission of Hawaii where it was asserted that Christian music should *not* be banned from Buddhist temples, for if one's faith is unshakable, the origin of a musical piece should be secondary to the music's esteemed aesthetic value. Another answer was suggested to the Hawaii Betsuin Choir when certain secular songs – much less Christian songs -- were frowned upon to be sung at temple-held funerals because of their almost contra-Buddhist lyrics.

I suppose the question partly concerns what we mean by Christian or Buddhist music. I once suggested that music becomes religious by association with lyrics that express faith. If so, does the same music *by itself, without lyrics*, still convey the same feelings? Is, for example, *Amazing Grace* still Christian music when only the music is played, not sung? Is *Ondokusan* still Jodo Shinshu when only instrumentally played? If a melody is identified with the lyrics to which it is "married", then it should follow that, much as in marriage, if that tune were "divorced" from its lyrics, its identity would change. It could even have a *new* identity if "remarried" to different lyrics;

after all, *Auld Lang Syne* and *Hotaru no hikari* have the same melody, though meanings and use differ.

My guess is that a musical work, like a person, never quite forsakes an identity, even when it assumes a new one. Rather, identities multiply. Thus, the prayer section of Sibelius' *Finlandia* is always that, even if identified also with Iolani School's alma mater. And I think *Amazing Grace* is still *Amazing Grace* even when its words are not sung. With music as with people, maybe marriage is irreversible -- even when "annulled". So, if one feels the lyrics of a Christian song sit uneasy with a Buddhist congregation, then I suppose playing the music itself would engender similar unease by association. This is of course another reason creating new Buddhist music can never stop – because with abundance we'd have little cause to resort to music of other faiths for our services.

"My guess is that a musical work, like a person, never quite forsakes an identity, even when it assumes a new one. Rather, identities multiply."

Francis Okano

Hawaii District

By Rev. Shinji Kawagoe

The Teaching Tells You Who You Are

On March 12th, the Fifth Annual Hawaii Association of International Buddhists (HAIB) Buddha Day Service was held at the Kona Hongwanji Buddhist Temple. I attended this event for the first time where different Buddhist sects joined together for the service. Guest speaker was Honpa Hongwanji's Bishop Eric Matsumoto. Attendees were not only Hongwanji ministers and members but also ministers and members from Shingon Mission and Soto Mission.

During the service, we had group presentations. Daifukuji family sangha with their minister, Rev. Nakade from Daifukuji Soto Mission in Kona, did a beautiful job singing *Planting a Seed of Peace*. I was impressed and learned a great deal from their performance.

I also contributed to the program by playing a violin solo. In my case, I like to play the violin by myself. However, through the performance of the Daifukuji family sangha with their minister, I realized that to perform or to do something with someone else defines your existence. I pondered that if I always play the violin by myself, I might not understand about everlasting deeper true self.

Now, I want to introduce a poem by our founder Shinran Shonin. It says that "Pure winds blow in the jewel-trees, producing the five tones of the scale. As those sounds are harmonious and spontaneous, pay homage to Amida, the one imbued with purity." Each tone is unique. And they do not discriminate from each other. That is why they can make a harmonious and spontaneous sound. I believe that to acknowledge others is one of the good ways to understand yourself more deeply than usual. Your existence is highlighted much more with the presence of other existences.

Your daily life is filled with Buddha's wonderful teachings. Your temple is not only a place to listen to the teaching. If you listen to what is going on around you, it will tell you who you are.



Kona's Daifukuji Soto Mission members, including Rev. Nakade, sing together as the "Daifukuji Family Sangha"!

Maui District

By Joan Tamori

Wailuku Hongwanji Mission Loves Making All Kinds of Music!

CHOIR: Choralfest gathas continue to inspire Wailuku Hongwanji Mission choir members. At the BWA memorial service held in December 2016, the choir presented the beautiful melodies and lyrics of **Cosmos Flower** and **Touched By Kindness**. The choir will soon be gearing up for practices as Obon season will be commencing in the summer with WHM's Obon being held the first weekend of August 2017. A choir favorite, **Flying Free**, and a new gatha written and composed by BJ Soriano, **Embraced By Amida's Vow**, will be sung on both nights.

DHARMA SCHOOL CHILDREN: Getting together children from preschool age to second grade, the dharma school took its first step in beginning a children's choir. With less than a month to practice for January 2017's New Year's party, director Joan Tamori, decided to excite the children with a dance to **Can't Stop the Feeling** by Justin Timberlake. The children enjoyed dancing in front of an encouraging audience.



Sammie, Takashi, Louis, and Erik dance to **Can't Stop the Feeling**.



D H A R M A STRUMMERS:

Instructor, Florence Tanaka, has done wonders with the Dharma Strummers as they are emerging into very skilled ukulele players. She encourages them every step of the way, empowering



them to learn more and do more. Barbara Parr plays the keyboard, ukulele, and guitar. Danny Topp has joined with his harmonica. At the Central Maui Hanamatsuri program held at Velma McWayne Santos Community Center, they dazzled the crowd with **Puff, the Magic Dragon** and **We Are Ohana** as well as accompanying the attendees at Maui's Fujimatsuri program in May at the temple.

"Puff, the Magic Dragon...."

Harmonica players, Danny Topp and Florence Tanaka



More Maui District...

Kahului Hongwanji Mission

“Local Style” Gatha Singing!

At KHM, the Strum and Sing with Patsy (aka SSP) ukulele and guitar group provides the musical accompaniment for gatha singing as they are without an organ accompanist. “Local style” gatha singing!



Central Maui Hanamatsuri Celebration



Barbara Parr and Eric Ikeuchi of the Wailuku Hongwanji Dharma Strummers, jammin’ with Floyd Nagoshi of Makawao Hongwanji at the Central Maui Hanamatsuri in April. Beautiful contemporary melodies were heard by all!

MUSIC COMMITTEE

Francis Okano, Chairman

- | | |
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