



THE FRUITS OF INTERDEPENDENCE

by Laurie Rubin-Taira

I experienced a number of firsts during my trip to Hawaii in 2004, including meeting my now wife Jenny's family for the first time, my first spam musubi, and my first Buddhist service. It was January 1st, and I walked into the Mililani Hongwanji for a New Year's service. There were two things that struck me that day. First, I was amazed by the tight knit community, much like a family, that Jenny was so comfortably ensconced in. Secondly, in the dharma talk that day, the word, "**interdependence**" was mentioned several times. I asked Jenny's father later that day what the Reverend meant. He explained that we are all connected, and that each and every action has a chain reaction. That rang very true to me, and it also explained why Jenny's family not only enjoyed every event they participated in, but they would also be more than willing to help out with things like set-up, clean-up, and planning. They did this with such vigor and energy that I became inspired.

Four years later, Jenny and I who were living in New York at the time, had come back to Hawaii to help her sister Cari, who was director of the Hongwanji Mission School's drama program, in the rehearsal process for a production of the musical, "Honk! Junior." When backstage at the Betsuin Social Hall where the production was taking place, I realized I was witnessing the Buddhist concept of interdependence in action. Everyone in the community lent a hand to Cari's productions, helping to make costumes, do make-up, build sets, and make refreshments to be sold at intermission. The show was a smashing success, and it was evident that the community at large had made it so.

Having been members of the Mililani Hongwanji with their parents, attending Dharma School, and being officers in the Jr. YBA, the Taira sisters had become fixtures in the Buddhist community in Hawaii. So, when Jenny had expressed her dream to start a performing arts program in Hawaii like the ones she had attended on the mainland, Cari urged her to turn her dream into a reality. When the two of them approached the HMS administration about the idea, they were embraced with open arms.

Ohana Arts got its start in 2010 as a program cross-registered through the Hongwanji Mission School's summer school. Students who attended got six weeks of high caliber musical theater education with professionals from Hawaii and the mainland, culminating in a fully staged production. I had the great fortune of joining Jenny and Cari as founders of Ohana Arts, witnessing firsthand how their Buddhist family had poured so much belief into this idea.

In 2013, Bishop Eric Matsumoto had called Cari into his office to run an idea by her. He explained that Ohana Arts had enriched the Buddhist community with a new performing arts element that had not only benefited the students, but had allowed the community at large to see a number of plays and musicals. He felt that the Buddhist communities on the neighbor islands should have this opportunity as well, and had suggested that Ohana Arts put together a touring production that could travel to the neighbor islands.

Jenny was very excited by this proposition. It gave her the idea to actually write a musical based on a story that had a great amount of significance to the Ohana Arts mission of cultivating peace through the arts, a story which had meant a lot to her for many years.

19 years ago, Jenny and Cari visited their older sister Kathy in Japan who was teaching in the JET program. During their travels, the sisters visited Hiroshima, and spent a day at the Peace Memorial Museum. Jenny was greatly moved by what she saw, by the state of devastation that Hiroshima was left in after the atomic bomb attack, by how many people had died or whose lives were turned upside down as a result. It was there that she



Ohana Arts Co-Founders/Artistic Directors: (L-R) Laurie Rubin-Taira, Jennifer Rubin-Taira (Exec. Dir.), and Cari Chung



Music Editorial

by Francis Okano

Music's Mature "Why"

Since they say many an 18-year-old is unsure of a career choice, it was gratifying to come across someone who is definite about hers. In fact she questioned her goals in an essay that won the recent Collegiate Writing Contest of the *Piano Magazine*. The author, a Brigham Young University student, explored what she hoped to achieve by studying piano performance.

"And so, I suppose we should ask ourselves what is the "why" for music in the temple. We will each have our own answers."

Knowing she wanted to teach, she asked, "what was the point of teaching students how to properly press black and white keys other than providing a hobby that doesn't kill brain cells?" If qualities of self-discipline, patience, and perseverance were outcomes, "was the end goal of my education to accomplish what a high school basketball coach could manage just as well?" What was different and worthwhile about music? Was music only about feelings and sensations that sounds elicit? Was it about impressing others, however fleetingly? We must, she says, have "a mature 'why'" we do what we do.

Then, one day, while assigning memories from her childhood and adolescence to passages from Chopin's fourth *Ballade*, which she was learning, it dawned upon her why music – piano teaching, in particular – was important for her. She discovered that "music provides a universe in which one can safely explore the entire gamut of emotions without

consequence...a sacred space to freely embrace the emotions that life circumstances pressure us to hide or disregard...that constructing this world for myself and for others,,,was why I wanted to study music."

Each musician, she continues, has a unique "why". "Handel 'wished to make [others] feel better.' Bach famously declared that 'The aim and final end of all music should be none other than the glory of God and the refreshment of the soul.' Schumann felt it was 'the duty of the artist' to 'send light into the darkness of men's hearts.' Copland asserted that music gives 'expressive meaning' to the 'human spirit.'"

She concludes, "if we want to make a contribution to the world through our art that goes beyond sensation alone, we must have a 'why' to fuel that drive." To a point well made, I say "bravo!" And so, I suppose we should ask ourselves what is the "why" for music in the temple. We will each have our own answers. As for me, I believe it has something to do with this -- that the musical notes and poetic words we sing, play, or hear at temple are intended to make us *feel* the embracing light of Amida Buddha shine within our hearts. I think that, by exposure to music's language of feelings, we heighten our sensitivity to the emotional content of what is spoken in the temple. As such, it helps us to digest sermons, to understand scriptures, and to speak kindly to our neighbors. We are made to feel, for example, comfort in being nurtured within the deep call of the Buddha, happiness over the countless blessings that make up this world, sober about awakening to the delusions of birth and death that bookend our human condition, and joyous over the endless inspirations from the dharma. As much a part of the temple's ambience as are the sermon, sutra, and incense, music, I believe, helps us *feel* the joy and gratitude of reciting the Nembutsu with an entrusting heart.

saw Sadako Sasaki's monument standing outside the museum, and it brought her back to fourth grade when she read about Sadako in a children's book.

Jenny's idea to write a musical for a cast entirely made up of youth, and to bring Sadako's story to life through musical theater would now have a chance to come to fruition with financial, promotional, and moral support from the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii. **"Peace On Your Wings,"** with music composed by Jenny, lyrics written by me, and directed by Cari, was born. It tells the true story of 12-year old atomic bomb victim Sadako Sasaki and her thousand paper cranes, and also shares the Buddhist message, **"ichigo-ichie,"** meaning, **"one chance, one meeting,"** encouraging people to appreciate and live every moment as if it were our last.

"Peace On Your Wings" was another display of interdependence at work. True to form, parents of cast members were helping with costumes, set construction, serving as chaperones and roadie crew for our tour to the neighbor islands. Once we arrived on Kauai, Maui, and the Big Island, "Peace On Your Wings" was embraced by the communities on each island. The local Hongwanjis came together to make and host meals for the cast and crew. They led PR efforts to get audiences, some of whom drove over an hour to see the show.

When the production traveled to Los Angeles in September 2015, communities from the BCA rallied together to support the show. Everywhere the show traveled, the community around it grew and continued to add to the village to raise the show. From New York to San Francisco, San Jose, and Sacramento, the show's family continued to multiply. As a result, we witnessed how a grassroots effort to spread a young girl's message of peace could turn into a movement and a national effort.

In the summer of 2020, Ohana Arts will be in its 11th year of existence. We now enroll over 100 students ages 6-18 from over 40 schools around Oahu, as well as a handful of students from the Mainland, and have put on over 25 fully staged musicals. The summer program now runs in cooperation with the University of Hawaii's Department of Theatre and Dance, and all productions take place at the Kennedy Theatre and Ernst Lab Theatre on the UH Manoa campus. Ohana Arts will always maintain its values and family feel from its Hongwanji Mission School roots. Our students come to the program to receive intensive training in musical theater and to participate in productions, but they return year after year to be part of an accepting family where they feel safe in being themselves, fostering lifelong friendships.

2020 also marks the 75th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. "Peace On Your Wings" will be traveling with a brand new Hawaii based cast on a four-city tour to commemorate the anniversary, including Honolulu, Denver, Los Angeles, and Hiroshima.

During the many years of training in music school, I heard many overnight success stories of my colleagues who won international competitions and instantly found themselves in major career paths. I think many of us are waiting for that epic, pivotal moment when the stars align for us. Little did I know that the day I met Jenny in graduate school was that life changing event for me. After years of freelancing in New York to pursue our musical paths carved out for us by our degrees, Jenny and I both realized that our hearts were with family; not only our immediate family, but our Hongwanji family as well. With all the fun and amazing performance experiences we have been fortunate to have, nothing was as incredibly powerful as watching a cast of Ohana Arts children and teens bringing Sadako's story to life on stage with such emotional poignancy, or seeing a growing village of individuals humbly adding their patch to the colorful quilt that Ohana Arts has become. As Ohana Arts continues to grow and develop over the years, the single most important value to us as founders is to continue fostering a tight knit community. While we want to provide the best performing arts education and exciting performance opportunities for our students, we always want to make sure that our actions, large or small, can contribute to something much more powerful than any one performance to make the world a better place.

For information on performances and tickets, please go to www.ohanaarts.org



Around the Big Island Temple News

by Ethel Miyashiro

The Big Island celebrated 2019 as the year to strive for peace, harmony, with understanding and acceptance of all people; and what better way to bring people together than through the universal language of music.

The year began in February with the 45th Annual **Gathafest** held at Kona Hongwanji Mission with six temples, the five amazing ministers (that serve our 13 temples) and the United Jr. YBA of Hawaii participating. The theme was “Embrace Change – Transformation”, “Walk in Peace”.

As always, the Big Island’s Gathafest is a day of gathering and reconnecting with old friends and making new friendships as we share harmony and our common bond to promote peace. The synergy produced by the young and the wise helped carry us through the day with smiles and laughter.



Honoka'a Band (*There is a Mountain, Chimes of Freedom*)



Reverends: Tomioka, Kawagoe, Siebuhr, Nakamura, Baba



Honomu (*Shinran Shonin* to “*Sugar Sugar*”)



Puna (*Arigatai* with Sign Language)



Hilo (*We Are Family*)



Kamuela (*Kamuela Hongwanji*)



Kona (*I am so Thankful, Namanda Butsu*)



United Jr. YBA (*This is Me*)

Gathafest
2019

Twilight Gathering of Peace in September

On Friday evening, September 20th, the Puna Hongwanji hosted its second annual, "Twilight Gathering of Peace," with a musical presentation of messages of peace. Performance groups included, the combined Puna and Hilo Betsuin Choirs, violin soloist Rev.

Kawagoe, and musicians and choirs from the community including the Pahoa choir of Keonepoko Elementary School.



Reverend Kawagoe
on violin



Joint Hilo and Puna Choirs (*Live and Light the World*)

Peace Day in Honoka'a

On Saturday, September 21st, in celebration of Peace Day, temple members from East Hawaii joined the Honoka'a community to participate in their annual Peace Day parade. Joined by Puna Taiko the festive group marched from the High School to the community park.



Puna Taiko

Giving Thanks in Harmony

The Interfaith's Community Thanksgiving Celebration on November 26th united members of the religious community in East Hawaii to share in **Giving Thanks in Harmony**. Groups included: Center for Spiritual Living; First United Protestant Church; Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints; Church of the Holy Cross; Unitarian Universal; Hilo Coast UCC; Open Arms Metropolitan CC; Hilo United Methodist Tongan choir; Church of the Holy Apostle; Ahava 'Aina; and Kosraean Hilo CC. Choirs/quartets and soloists performed a capella or were accompanied by various instruments - piano, guitar, ukulele, violin and flute. The messages conveyed with each musical piece were of love, gratitude, perseverance, and hope.

The combined Hilo Betsuin, Puna Hongwanji and Lutheran churches led by BJ Soriano sang ***Lean on Me*** accompanied by Karen Maedo on piano. In the spirit of the Interfaith Service, members of the congregation happily joined us in song!!

In closing, the Interfaith community sang ***Let There Be Peace on Earth***, the first verse reminding us:

*"Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me
Let there be peace on earth
The Peace that was meant to be"*



It is our hope that by offering and participating in events of peace, we will bring awareness to our actions and words and what it takes to "make a peaceful community".

Combined choirs (***Lean on Me***) an offering of hope and friendship

Wailuku Hongwanji Buddhist Temple

2019 was filled with auspicious occasions which offered the Choir, Dharma Strummers, and the Dharma School children opportunities to spread Nembutsu joy through the music of singing voices and ukulele strumming.

WH CHOIR: Dressed in their vibrant purple robes, the members of the WH Choir sang beautifully for WH's annual Obon services in August. Choir members performed to a full congregation on both nights presenting the gathas, ***Touched by Kindness*** and ***Amida Within My Heart***. On October 20, Wailuku Hongwanji Buddhist Temple commemorated its 120th Anniversary with a special service, program and luncheon. An early request for the choir to sing, set practices in motion months ahead and



Choir sings ***May Peace Prevail*** and ***Live and Light the World*** at WHBT's 120th Anniversary

choir director, Joan Tamori, could not have been more pleased with the choir's outstanding performance of ***May Peace Prevail*** and ***Live and Light the World*** at the service. The men of the choir were featured in one verse of ***Live and Light the World***. Nice job, men! In December, the choir offered two gathas, ***Amida's Compassionate Vow*** and ***Upon Clouds*** at the BWA Memorial Service.

WH DHARMA STRUMMERS: The Dharma Strummers have been meeting periodically for practices under the direction of leader, Florence Tanaka. Eric Ikeuchi and Danny Topp are her assistants collaborating with her for presentation ideas, and providing of sound equipment. The Dharma Strummers were featured in the entertainment portion of the 120th Anniversary luncheon. They expertly accompanied the dharma school students. The Dharma Strummers ended with an audience participation song, ***The Happy Wanderer***.

Danny gave instructions to the crowd and led a practice before the final round with Eric leading off with introductions on his amplified ukulele. It was truly a great interactive idea that had the audience gaily singing along!



Dharma Strummers accompanying students on ***Do Re Mi***

WH DHARMA SCHOOL: The students started the party at the New Year's Sokai in January with a heart-warming performance of **One Little Candle** (a song about promoting peace using sign language). In April, the students again performed the same song at the Central Maui Hanamatsuri program at the Velma McWayne Santos Community Center. It was an important practice for them as their trip to Kauai was to come up in a few weeks on April 19-21. At Lihue Hongwanji Mission's Sunday service, the students performed a play, "The Color of Friendship" and ended with signing the special song, **One Little Candle**. At the 120th Anniversary luncheon, the audience was treated to a Dharma School students' performance of **Do Re Mi** which was presented with singing, hand motions, and signs. Students ranging from grades pre-school to intermediate made for a nice range of ages and talents. Older third and fourth grade students held signs, while the very young did their best to perform with hand motions. Soloist, Kamauoha Tomita, 5th grader, confidently and melodiously sang many lines of the beginning leading up to the song. Outstanding effort, Dharma School students!



Kamauoha (bottom left) sings intro to **Do Re Mi** and
Dharma School students sing and do motions



Dharma Strummers sing and accompany students

Makawao Hongwanji Buddhist Temple

Before the start of its fall Ohigan Service, a new gatha, **Namu Amida Butsu**, by the **Cherryblossomz**, was shared. These three talented young women are members of BCA temples. It is a lovely song that was enjoyed very much by everyone. Some BWA members were fortunate to hear them perform at the World BWA Conference. They perform this gatha in the following YouTube clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4kpUSSDcYc>

Rev. Kerry Kiyohara has been communicating with the group who kindly provided sheet music for the song. It is Rev. Kiyohara's hope to have their Jr. YBA members transcribe the chords and music for ukulele, as well.

Makawao Hongwanji Buddhist Temple's President, Floyd Nagoshi, has been playing the guitar to accompany gatha singing once a month, when Rev. Kiyohara is away at other temples as a guest speaker and is unavailable to play the musical accompaniment from the temple's iPhone. MHBT has been without an organist for a year and since their CD player "was born in the Pure Land", they digitized all the old CDs onto an old iPhone that was donated. MHBT is providing music for its congregation by using innovative technology methods!

CHORAL FEST 2020

September 26 - 27

Hawaii Betsuin
1727 Pali Highway,
Honolulu, Hawaii

Conductor: *Nola Nahulu*

Gathas:

Live and Light the World
Flower's Heart
Because I Met You
White Lotus Flowers
With a Smile

Deadline to Register: **April 30, 2020**

Registration Fee: **\$30**

For more information call the
Office of Buddhist Education at
808.522.9202

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8th Hawaii Choralfest in September

On December 10, 2019 Bishop Eric Matsumoto announced open enrollment for Choralfest 2020, to be held at the Honpa Hongwanji Hawaii Betsuin in Honolulu on September 26-27, 2020. This eighth Hawaii choralfest will again give participants an opportunity to experience organized mass singing of contemporary choral Buddhist gathas at a special music service on Sunday. An intense but fun-filled half-day rehearsal will be held on Saturday. The purpose of the musical event is for both singers and listeners to be inspired by the gathas and to feel the joy of the Buddha-Dharma. Choral gathas to be featured include *Live and Light the World*, *Flower's Heart*, *Because I Met You*, *White Lotus Flowers*, and *With a Smile*.

The event is open to singers from all temples in Hawaii and to a limited number from BCA and Japan. The festival choir will be conducted by Nola Nahulu, who has directed all past Hawaii choral-fests to much appreciation and acclaim. Piano accompanist will be Francis Okano.

If you are at all intrigued by the beauty of the human voice in harmonized singing, you owe it to yourself to participate and to experience for yourself the joy of the Nem-buttsu, as you make music with friends. You may view recordings of past choral singing on youtube.