

MRS. MITSUYO SAITO'S RETIREMENT PARTY

By Wendie Yumori

Hawaii Betsuin Choir members hosted a warmly appreciative retirement celebration on November 17, 2013 for well-loved Choir Director, Mrs. Mitsuyo Saito (Mitzi). Under Mitzi's direction for the past 18 years, the Choir's musical offerings have infused Dharma joy into the Betsuin's major services and special observances and numerous invitational events in the community.

A slideshow entitled "*This is Your Life, Mrs. Saito!*" was shown to party attendees and it quickly became apparent to all that Mitzi has been sharing her love of music and the joy of the Nembutsu for over 54 years! She has directed the Hilo Betsuin Fujinkai Chorus Group on the Big Island, the Koloa Hongwanji Choir on Kauai, the Lahaina Singing Group on Maui, the Papaikou Hongwanji Children's Choir on the Big Island, and the Pearl City Hongwanji Choir and Hawaii Betsuin Choir on Oahu! Mitzi recalled most fondly the photo of the Centennial 100 Children's Choir, the participants of which were drawn from children sang under Mitzi's direction to Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii in one in expressing the joy of the Neming of oneness and of being supported

Following the slideshow, it School students, which included and do the hand motions to one of **Mori**, as taught by Mitzi. The encore dents!

Choir member and violinist, of meeting Mitzi and becoming in-ago and then played a touching origi-dedicated that day to Mitzi – **Mitzi's**

Choir members, led by singing one of Mitzi's delightful musi-which were written by Cecilia Lindo. as the audience sang the chorus with

A tribute to Mitzi would not ing from Mitzi's valued musical part-Francis Okano. Francis met Mitzi back in 1961, when he was invited from Honolulu to perform a solo piano recital in Hilo. In honor of his first meeting with Mitzi, Francis masterfully played three Brahms pieces, **Intermezzi op. 118 no. 1 and 2**, and **Rhapsody op. 79 no. 2**, which Mitzi had enjoyed during Francis's 1961 recital program. In so doing, Francis placed memorable musical bookends on Mitzi's career of over half a century.

Master of Ceremonies, Dennis Sekine, pointed out to the audience the enlarged poster of Mitzi's essay, "**My Dream – Message to Shinran Shonin**", written in Japanese and submitted to Honzan's 750th Memorial Essay Contest in Jan. 2011. Choir members had requested that Mitzi read an English translation of her essay at her retirement celebration and she graciously consented. As Mitzi read, everyone learned of Mitzi's dream "...of seeing the Nembutsu spread in ever-widening circles all over the world through meaningful Buddhist Gathas..." and her conviction, "...one crucial task...was to translate the original Gathas with Japanese lyrics into Gathas with singable English lyrics..."



Mitsuyo (Mitzi) Saito

temples across the state. When the commemorate the Centennial of the 1989, Mitzi felt that they "all became butsu." She will never forget that feel-by every temple.

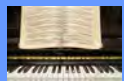
was so much fun to see the Dharma Mitzi's former students, sing, dance, their favorite songs, **Maru Maru Mori** included Mitzi performing with the stu-

Mari Murakami, shared her memories volved with the Choir over a decade nal piano composition that Mari had **Heart**.

Wendie Yumori, surprised Mitzi by cal compositions, **Arigatai**, the lyrics of Mitzi and Wendie conducted together choir members.

have been complete without an offer-ner, Betsuin Choir piano accompanist,

Music Editorial



Music Editorial

WHY CHORALFEST?

By Francis Okano

This September's Choralfest 2014, with again one of Hawaii's beloved choral conductors, promises musical fun we have come to expect. Sometimes, however, I wonder if the purpose of choralfest is clear. What do we gain from singing a few choral gathas at a music service?

Years ago I remember thinking if I could just fill the *hondo* with rich organ sounds, the congregation would swell and all would be hunky-dory. In time I realized I had the order wrong. Musical sounds do not a temple make. To help, notes must have meaning. In the temple, music does not serve religion; rather, it is faith that serves music.

Does music influence what the temple teaches? Clearly not, for Buddhism remains itself whatever music fills the temple. Instead, our religious beliefs are what give shape and color to the feelings we put into the music. So, temple music has meaning so far as faith gives it meaning. What I think this means is: first, temple music *needs* to express Buddhist feelings; and, second, done with an entrusting heart, we can create *any* music in the temple, within bounds of good Buddhist taste.

If this happens to broaden temple music, let us also remember the best part: (a) we already have a body of gathas that sincerely express Buddhist outlook; (b) these gathas have been arranged, with stunning beauty, for choral – not just congregational – singing; (c) they have been rendered to be sung in English; and (d) some of *these* gathas are precisely the ones to be sung at choralfest. To top it all, a bonus of Choralfest 2014 is the premiere of a new choral gatha, *The Buddha's Great Light*, written by gifted local talent. What more could one ask?

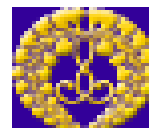
For heartfelt expression, one need only listen to sample lyrics: "In times of difficulty,...in times of gratitude, I say Namō Amida Butsu" (*The Buddha's Great Light*). We hear tender prayer – "Mida, hear my wish for this child!" (*Lullaby for Children of the World*) – and nature's metaphor – "Oh, so carefree and so beguiling are flowers, cosmos, smiling" (*Cosmos Flower*) – and new-found joy – "My life, my life each day is born anew!" (*Each Day Anew*). And words cannot describe how movingly the accompanying music speak.

So, why a choralfest? If temple is many things, surely one of them is to experience the deep joy of the Buddha-Dharma through music. Not only are we Buddhists open to a range of *musical* expression in the temple, we are mindful of *religious* expression of our faith through music. What better time than at choralfest to explore Buddhist feelings that are born in the hearts of composers and gain life in the hearts of both performers and listeners?

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Saito—continued from page 1

Dennis emphasized that Honzan had recognized the great significance of Mitzi's dream and her essay was one of 13 selected from 1,364 entries to be displayed at Honzan in 2011.

During her tenure as Betsuin Choir Director, Mitzi made an effort to introduce many new gathas published by Kyoto Hongwanji to the Choir. With a sincere desire to have these appealing choral gathas translated into singable English, Mitzi chaired the Gatha Translation Subcommittee of the HHM Music Committee from 2005 to 2013. During this time, 41 singable English renditions of Japanese gathas were completed and distributed statewide and to the headquarters of the Buddhist Churches of America, Canada Hongwanji, and North America Higashi Hongwanji on the mainland. In her essay, Mitzi noted that expressing the feeling of the Japanese lyricist can be challenging in English, but that **Namu Amida Butsu** requires no translation whatsoever. It is here and now, overseas from Japan, always and ever, **Namu Amida Butsu**. Choir members then sang with feeling the translated gathas that Mitzi had cited in her essay, **Amida's Compassionate Vow** and **Nembutsu**. The Choir's ending gathas, **Ondokusan I** and its English translation, **Gratefulness I**, had special meaning for Mitzi; it was upon hearing **Ondokusan** in her youth that Mitzi's fascination with Buddhist gathas began.

Mitzi's retirement celebration program was a tribute to her remarkable musical legacy. In sharing her love of music and the joy of the Nembutsu, she has inspired countless individuals. Most gratifying to Mitzi are her former students who come running up to her and thank her for instructing them in Japanese language and in songs and dance, some of them proudly declaring that they are officers in their temples. Mitzi says, "It is very encouraging to witness that many of the children under my care are leading their lives as devoted Buddhists."

Betsuin Choir members have wonderful memories of the past 18 years with Mitzi, especially the warm musical fellowship and aloha during their Goodwill Singing Tour of California temples, their three trips to Japan to participate in the mass choir Mido Ensoukai at Honzan in Kyoto, and the past four HHM statewide ChoralFests. One choir member who has been with Mitzi since 1995 has said, "Singing with the Betsuin Choir has been a joyful and inspiring journey for me. The Onembutsu becomes real and resonates in my heart and mind. Mitsuyo Saito has fulfilled her dream in Hawaii. Arigato! Namu Amida Butsu."



TRANSLATION SUB-COMMITTEE REPORT

By Mitsuyo Saito

7 gathas were translated by the committee in the past three years:



Awakening (Nyushin)
Happily Together (Minna Nakayoku)
How Happy I Am! (Go On Ureshiya)
Lullaby for Children of the World (Nonnosama)
Other Shore (Higan)
Song of O-Bon (Bon E no Uta)
Touched by Kindness (Yasashisa ni Deattara)



During the 1980's, the Hawaii Kyodan Music Department took on the project of translating gathas. They translated 15 singable gathas which have all appeared in the "**Praises of the Buddha**" gatha book, Centennial Edition in 1990. In the 1990's, two more gathas were translated. Translators were Shigeaki Fujitani, Midori Kondo, Glenn Nagatoshi and Francis Okano (Chair). In 2005, a translation subcommittee was reorganized and 41 gathas were translated. Let us sing these translated English gathas to spread the joy of the Dharma!

I wish to thank the following Translation Subcommittee members for your kind support and assistance that you have given me these past years: Shigeaki Fujitani, Osamu Kawabata, Ruby Nagao, Francis Okano, Florence Wasai, and Wendie Yumori

Thank you very much,

Mitsuyo Saito

Mrs. Saito Farewell Coffee Hour November 17, 2013



M.C. Dennis Sekine



Mitsuyo Saito & Rev. Yoshikazu Saito



Daughter-in-law Dr. Ruth Ohata & Bert Saito



Parent Miki Saito



Dharma School children sang "Maru Maru Mori Mori" for Mrs. Saito.



Choir member, Mari Murakami, played her original composition dedicated to "Mitzi's Heart"



Choir accompanist Francis Okano played Brahms pieces in honor of his and Mrs. Saito's first meeting in 1961.



Wendie Yumori led the choir and guests in singing "Arigatai", lyrics by Cecilia Lindo and music by Mitsuyo Saito.



Retiring Choir Director Mitsuyo Saito led Betsuin Choir in singing three translated gathas.

MY DREAM
A Message to Shinran Shonin
 By Mitsuyo Saito
 January 10, 2011



I am exceedingly grateful -- knowing that I share the same birthdate, May 21, with Shinran Shonin, it is so meaningful for me to be given this opportunity to write a letter to the founder of the Honpa Hongwanji denomination. It's as if I am in a dream!

In the small temple where I was born and brought up, a carved wooden image of Shinran Shonin is enshrined, purported to have been carved by his disciple. Once a year, during the Gotan-e service on May 21, the doors concealing the wooden image are opened to the members and the white scarf around Shinran Shonin's neck is replaced. With his image in rare view before us, the congregation sings *Ondokusan*. The singing of *Ondokusan* was my first encounter with Buddhist Gathas when I was young. It touched my heart and it was a moment I will never forget. So it was in my youth that my fascination with beautiful Buddhist Gathas began.

I have been living in Hawaii for over 50 years now; throughout this time and to this day I have been very fortunate to be so closely associated with Buddhist Gathas, to be able to listen to them and to teach them. In order to pursue my Dream of seeing the Nembutsu spread in ever-widening circles all over the world through meaningful Buddhist Gathas, there was one crucial task that I felt compelled to accomplish. It was to translate the original Gathas with Japanese lyrics into Gathas with singable English lyrics. Many years have elapsed and the *Ondokusan* which inspired me in my youth, when it was sung in Japanese, has changed; here, in the present, it can be sung in English.

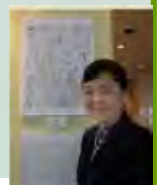
So that such beautiful Japanese Gathas, that had been sung for many years, could be translated, a Translation Subcommittee was re-organized and the English translation of Gathas commenced. It required that great effort be taken to convey, as faithfully as possible, the deep meaning of the Teachings underlying the Gatha, and to consider the poetic feeling of the Japanese writer. Moreover, the translated sentences had to match the original musical notation of the Gatha. Only after attempting to fit English words to the notes in the measures of each stanza did I realize that a particular word can have such a big effect and influence the music so much.

There are certain expressions that need no translation, however. The Japanese Gathas, *Mida Daihi no Seigan o* and *Nembutsu* have been translated into English with the titles *Amida's Compassionate Vow* and *Nembutsu*. In the English lyrics, the essence of the Six Characters of the Nembutsu, **Namo Amida Butsu**, is vibrantly sung with no alteration whatsoever -- here and now, overseas from Japan, always and ever -- **Namo Amida Butsu**.

There is more to my humble Dream. I wished to compose Gathas that young children could sing whenever they wished and wherever they are. With this in mind, I have written several Gathas. Have the Gathas that we have sung from the depths of our hearts reached you, Shinransama? Shinransama, in the coming years, when we have the occasion to meet each other, let us form a Pure Land Choir and let us sing Gathas in the English language together. This realization is another part of my Dream. I wonder, Shinransama, if you will be singing with the tenor group or, perhaps, with the men in the bass group.

Let our voices echo throughout Ojodo, the Pure Land --

THE GATHAS ARISING FROM OUR HEARTS.



Oahu District

by Gail Taira

Oahu District Peace Concert



On Sunday, September 22, 2013, Oahu District Sangha members and community members gathered at Wahiawa Hongwanji to celebrate Peace Day. The morning began with a short service, followed by musical presentations by Wahiawa, Pearl City, Waipahu and Mililani Hongwanji Dharma School students. Bishop Matsumoto and family, as well as Sadako Sasaki's brother, Masahiro Sasaki and his family, including Masahiro's son, Yuji Sasaki, also joined us for lunch and the program. The keynote speaker was Mr. Stephen Chinen, of UH Rainbow Warrior fame. It was Mr. Chinen's perseverance and belief that the UH football team should carry the name "Rainbows" that helped to convince UH Athletic Director, Ben Jay, to keep the name, "Rainbows". Mr Chinen's very inspiring talk was entitled, "Rainbows In Me: Values of Aloha". Everyone enjoyed a very delicious buffet lunch. After lunch, the audience was entertained by Jenny Taira and Laurie Rubin, when they sang, *Buddha's Great Light*. The Warm Pockets, a group that came together this past summer at the Ohana Arts Summer School of the Arts, the Iliahi Elementary School Ukulele group, and Wahiawa Middle School Jazz Band provided some very lively and engaging music for all to enjoy! An acclaimed and popular singer in Japan, Yuji Sasaki, Sadako's nephew, sang *Inori*, the song he composed in honor of Sadako and her story.



Pearl City and Waipahu
Hongwanji Dharma Schools



Wahiawa Hongwanji
Dharma School



Jenny Taira and Laurie Rubin
sing *Buddha's Great Light*.

Honolulu District

by Osamu Kawabata

Jikoen Choir Welcomes New Members

At the 75th anniversary celebration of Jikoen Temple, the Jikoen Choir sang the gatha ***Sanki***, in which the minister's gong marked the beginning and end of the *recitative* chant. Among new members of the Choir are Kacie Moribe, Keith Oshiro, Marlene Nishiyama, and Jaryd Oshiro.

Highlights of Hawaii Betsuin Choir's Fall 2013

27th Annual Imin Yosebaka Obon Service, July 20, at Makiki Cemetery, sponsored by United Japanese Society of Hawaii, at which choir sang ***Cosmos Flower, Splendor of an Evening Sky, Overflowing Light, and Gratefulness*** (with congregation). The solemn ceremony honored early hardships of Japanese immigrants.



Choir at Yosebaka Service

Japan Spring Tour Reunion Choir Party, August 15, at Mrs. Ruth Tokumi's Manoa home, at which a viewing of videos by Roy Yumori, Ruth Tokumi, and Lois Ohta, dinner and camaraderie were enjoyed by all.

Interfaith Peace Day Service at Hawaii Betsuin, September 20, sponsored by Pacific Buddhist Academy, Honpa Hongwanji Hawaii, and Interfaith Council in which the choir sang ***Where Peaceful Waters Flow*** and soprano Brandi Yamamoto soloed with ***Nada Sou Sou***. Speaker was Mr. Yuji Sasaki, nephew of Sadako Sasaki, a school girl victim of Hiroshima who folded a thousand *origami* cranes for eternal peace. Mr. Sasaki sang ***Inori***, which he composed in honor of Sadako, in this touching observance of peace.



Brandi sings *Nada Sou Sou*



Yuji Sasaki, nephew of Sadako Sasaki, sings *Inori*.



Choir sings at the Nuuanu Interfaith Thanksgiving Service.



Choir poses for a photo at the Bodhi Day Service.

Hawaii Island District

by Ethel Miyashiro

Around the Big Island

On Tuesday, November 26th, the Hilo Betsuin, choir joined by singers from Naalehu and Puna, participated in the 2013 Interfaith Communities in Action (ICIA) Thanksgiving Celebration held at the Hilo United Methodist Church. The theme for this year's celebration was "Celebrate our Unity in Diversity" honoring and paying respect to people of all faiths through music and song. This year, members of various universal faiths such as Bahai, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist and Christian came together to share their talents both instrumentally and vocally.



BJ Soriano leading the combined choirs
at the Interfaith Service

A few of the highlights, in this writer's humble opinion, included the Hilo UMC Tongan Choir, the combined choirs of Christ Lutheran Church & Church of the Holy Apostles, the brilliance of Alden Young on Violin accompanied by his mother, Cathy Young on piano, an organ/piano duet and the powerful singing of the Kosraean Fellowship of the First United Protestant Church. And not to be overlooked, the Hilo Betsuin Choir joined by members from Naalehu and Puna Hongwanji sang *Flying Free* under the

guidance of their energetic leader, BJ Soriano.

The evening provided the harmony and joyfulness to launch the holiday season. Everyone who attended and participated expressed their gratitude in being able to have such a wonderful event in Hilo.

Did you know...

...that the Hilo Betsuin has a men's choir??? Yes, under the direction of BJ Soriano, the **Gentlemen's Choir** sang a Patriotic Medley entitled *My Country 'Tis of Thee and America* at the Veteran's Day Appreciation Service at HHHB held on November 3rd.

...that following Gathafest 2013, the singers from Honokaa decided that they wanted to continue singing and so, the Dharma Band was reborn again as the New Dharma Band? In forming the **New Dharma Band**, Miles Okumura and his wife, who share a deep love of music, did some in depth research for Buddhist songs with Dharma values and have developed a list of music that have been put to a new beat. These golden oldies, put to a modern beat, is cross generational and gets everyone moving to the rhythm of the music while infusing messages of peace and harmony. The **New Dharma Band** has a membership of eight singers, half of whom are from Honokaa Hongwanji and half from the local community. In addition, they have five to six very talented musicians who accompany the singers in their performances. One of the goals of the **New Dharma Band** is to promote community outreach and recruit young singers and musicians and get everyone rocking to their Buddhist songs.

Upcoming Events:

The planning committee for the 2014 BWA State Convention has selected the song, *We Can Make a Difference* by Mary Donnelly, to promote the goals of the BWA. You may be familiar with another one of Mary Donnelly's popular works, *Peace Begins With Me*, so expect another touching song. Kona Hongwanji will announce the distribution of the music to the temples as soon as it is ready.



L-R: Barry Taniguchi, Hardy Iida, George Uwono, Kelvin Sewake, and Jim Nakagawa.

Row 2, L-R: Jere Usui, Ken Ikemori, Joe Tanaka, and Cyrus Wilson

Maui District

by Joan Tamori

WAILUKU HONGWANJI MISSION CHOIR SINGS

Summertime found this choir director/'Musical Notes' editor taking a break from busy church and dharma school activities as well as teaching children in a public school. Hence, the choir took a break too until mid July when practice started up



Ladies and gentlemen of the choir sing with gratitude in their hearts.

again for Wailuku Hongwanji Mission's O-bon services the first weekend in August. The WHM choir rendered one song, ***Flying Free***, with Donna Ikeuchi beautifully accompanying the choir on her flute and one gatha, ***Nembutsu***, for both Friday and Saturday evening services. Tal-



Donna concentrates as she accompanies the choir.

ented Dale Sugiki continually plays the difficult music accompaniment on the organ. Singing for O-bon services gives the choir an opportunity to showcase Choralfest gathas or songs to the public as these services are well-attended by many nonmembers. Listening to the sermons and dharma through song is a wonderful way to spread the nembutsu teachings. Choir members sang eloquently and with grateful hearts.

In November, the choir geared up once again to practice for WHM's Buddhist Women's Association Memorial Service to be held in December. The service honored five BWA members who had passed away during the year. The choir sang ***Peace Begins With Me*** and ***The Wondrous Gift of Peace*** with heavy hearts as they each remembered a dear fellow choir/BWA member who had very recently passed on.



Altos pause as Joan Tamori leads

wailukuhongwanji.org coming soon...

Most recent news is that WHM is in the process of revising its website. Upon completion of this project in the very near future, everyone is welcomed to peruse the site and special attention is requested to navigate the website for the history of the Wailuku Hongwanji Mission Choir.

Nola Nahulu

conducts...

Choralfest 2014

*at Hawaii Betsuin
in September*

On **September 27 and 28, 2014**, the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii will hold **Choralfest 2014** at the **Hawaii Betsuin** in Honolulu. All Hawaii temples and a few BCA temples were sent announcements, flyers, and registrations forms. Upwards of 150 singers are expected to participate.

The two-day event gets under way on Saturday (September 27) at 1:00 pm at the Hawaii Betsuin Social Hall for an all-afternoon rehearsal, with refreshment breaks. Dinner and fellowship will follow from 6:00 pm to 7:30 pm. On Sunday, the massed choir will perform selected choral gathas at a music service at 10:00 AM at Hawaii Betsuin. The program concludes with bento and fellowship following the music service.

The festival choir will be conducted by Nola Nahulu, Living Treasure of Hawaii, who has led the biennial event since its 2005 inception. Selections will number four choral gathas translated from the Japanese, to include ***Cosmos Flower*** (Kosumosu no hana) ***Lullaby for Children of the World*** (Non no sama), ***Each Day Anew*** (Inochi mainichi atarashii), and ***Amida's Compassionate Vow*** (Mida daihi no seigan wo). The fifth selection will debut a new gatha composed by Jennifer Taira, on request, to the winning lyrics of the 2011 Lyrics Contest, ***The Buddha's Great Light***, by Carrie Kawamoto of Mililani Hongwanji. To conclude, choir and congregation will sing ***Gratefulness II*** (Ondokusan II).

Whether veteran or first-time choral singer, everyone is welcome to attend. The youth are particularly encouraged. Registration and fee (\$30) must be received by the Honpa Hongwanji of Hawaii Headquarters by **April 1, 2014**. Participants will receive a booklet and a practice CD for *required* preparation. Please see your temple offices to register, or contact the Music Committee through Headquarters (808-522-9210).