



Buddhist Churches of America®  
MUSIC

# BCA Music Committee

NEWSLETTER • OCTOBER 2023



Rev. Yuki Sugahara (guitar), Wynn Kiyama (taiko), Elaine Yuzuriha and Traci Kiyama at the Oregon Buddhist Temple Obon. *Photo by Maho Garner*

## OBT Music History

By Amy Peterson, Oregon Buddhist Temple

Music has been in my life since birth. I remember my mom singing “Three Little Fishes” even though my sister swears mom couldn’t carry a tune. My dad sang at any event and later in life did Karaoke and Shigin. I played clarinet, the last of the family to use the metal clarinet. I sang in grade school and even in the specialty group. Both of those things carried over to high school and even a madrigal group in college.

Growing up, while in scouts we made our own song books so we had all the camp songs. My sister gave me a copy of her folk song lyrics which I added to my songbook. My dad and other Dharma School teachers did parody songs for different events; ministers leaving or coming, Dharma School Coordinator retiring, conventions, etc. Decades later we did the same thing and added them to Hanamatsuri programs.

While I knew we had talented people in the Sangha, I really didn’t think about it since it was so hard to get groups together like other temples. People came and left and I took taiko with Rev. Julie Hanada, and a couple of things on the ukulele at district conventions. (I didn’t get to join the temple ukulele group led by Board members Yoshi Ono and Ken Garner because of conflicts), and the temple choir with M.A. Etsuko Osaki.

*(continued on page 2)*



## BCA Music Chairperson’s Message

By Kemi Nakabayashi

### *BCA Founding Day is September 1.*

Currently, we’re looking ahead to next year when we will celebrate the BCA 125th Anniversary, including the BCA 125th Anniversary Founding Day Service on September 1, 2024. This special service will be held at the Buddhist Church of San Francisco in a hybrid format for online viewers. The BCA Music Committee also marks the anniversary of our organizing meetings around Labor Day weekend each year — we just turned 3 years old!

The inaugural issue of the BCA Music Newsletter highlighted the first two years of the BCA Music Committee. This issue focuses more on celebrating the future but not before expressing gratitude to key participants of BCA Music Committee from the Oregon Buddhist Temple. Please enjoy reading Amy Peterson’s article. I would especially like to acknowledge Rev. Yuki Sugahara and Wynn Kiyama. Rev. Sugahara, now Rinban at Sacramento Betsuin, was one of the original ministerial advisors for the BCA Music Committee. He also recently served on the judging panel of the gatha lyric contest while in the process of moving from Portland to Sac-

*(continued on page 3)*

## OBT Music History (from page 1)



Chris Dart, OBT Obon odori teacher. Photo by Maho Garner

The Portland J.A.C.L. organized the Minidoka Swing band (<https://www.minidokaswingband.com/>) spearheaded by the late Roberta “Robbie” Tsuboi and supported by then president Connie Masuoka in 2007 while recruiting many Dharma School students to fill the chairs. The students grew up leaving open chairs filled by other temple members.

What I found was a Board member (now temple president, Charles Reneau) who is with the Oregon Symphony on trombone, and even did an educational video about the trombone. Symphony Storytime • “The Mitten” featuring the bass trombone.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjaADOINwPQ>

I used to write gathas while traveling long distances and even made my daughters come up with some. They begrudgingly wrote:

*Buddha Is My Friend  
Buddha is my friend,  
Buddha is my Teacher  
He helps me and he teaches me  
in every way he can.  
When I am sad and when I am lonely  
He cheers me up and plays with me  
by the Nembutsu.*

*La, La  
La, la the Buddha is so nice to me.  
He is my friend because he helps me.  
He is very nice to me.*

They thought they were being snotty, but the songs are pretty simple and good.

I wrote one that made it to the Stone Soup Newsletter for Dharma School teachers sung as a round:

*Picture the Buddha  
Picture the Buddha,  
Candles burning bright,  
Offerings of incense, Flowers, rice,  
Listen to the Dharma, hear the gong.  
Following the teachings,  
won't you come along.*

One day I hope to find someone to fill in the harmony and music on some other songs.

We were very fortunate to have Wynn Kiyama in our Sangha who not only did taiko, but wrote the history of Obon dance in America. While living in New York, Wynn was fortunate to meet and study classic Japanese dance with renowned Sahomi Tachibana. Sadly he and his family have moved to Oahu for family and some new adventures. During his tenure in Portland, Wynn recruited Sangha members, including his wife Traci and sister-in-law Jenna Yokoyama to not only write but choreograph our own Portland Ondo.

Sangha member, Chris Dart, is a retired tech person and wears many temple hats. She is our very talented and dedicated Obon dancer, who under the tutelage of Sahomi Tachibana, personal education in Japan, and many hours of study online, has started a monthly dance group as our new Obon Sensei. She tirelessly leads the Obon classes starting three weeks prior to Obon and does the scout education for the BCA scouting Obon patch. Chris recruited her granddaughter to Zoom the practices and record the dances at Obon which you can find on our website:

<https://www.oregonbuddhisttemple.com/obon-dance>  
Chris even provided Obon during the pandemic so we could do a virtual Obon.

Lastly, and surely not least, is our now promoted Rev. Yuki Sugahara who brought a new dimension to our Sunday services monthly playing his bass guitar. He shared with us the music of Rev. Harry Bridge and Rinban Katsuya Kusunoki which helped during the pandemic, creating Zoom or YouTube special services, making them really special.

When BCA Music Committee chairperson Kemi Nakabayashi wanted to start a music newsletter, we all signed on at her request. She and Donna Sasaki had written and arranged several pieces of work and introduced them to the temple via our Northwest District conventions and Dharma School teacher seminars. Such occasions brought me the ultimate opportunity of celebrating the 850th Birthday of Shinran Shonin and 17th World Buddhist Women’s Conference where I sang on stage with 20 other BWA members from the United States.

There’s more on the horizon.

My “Grandpas’ Gift” was over a hundred years of Nembutsu in Oregon (AP 1993), which was “For Me Alone (AP 1995).

Now I “Hear the Ringing Temple Bell” (D.S. 2023) and “Bow Low” (AP Circa 1994)

“With Gassho From the Heart” (D.S. 2022)



### BCA MUSIC NEWSLETTER

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## Chairperson's Message *(from page 1)*

ramento. Wynn Kiyama took on the co-chair positions of two of our BCA Music subcommittees, Bon Odori/Taiko and Music History. We appreciated Wynn's capable leadership for the first two years and are delighted that he continues to support these subcommittees. Wynn has also been chronicling bon odori dance instructors in the series of articles this year "50+ Years in the Dance Circle" in the BCA *Wheel of Dharma*. The last article for this year in the September issue features Reiko Iwanaga from San Jose. <https://www.buddhistchurchesofamerica.org/wheel-of-dharma>

Look for more articles from Wynn before next year's bon odori season.

In addition to Rev. Sugahara, Rev. Michael Endo and Rev. Cyndi Yasaki were the other ministers on the gatha lyric contest judging panel along with dii Lewis, Donna Sasaki, Dennis Yamashita, and me. Thank you to Darlene Bagshaw for FDSTL and BCA administrative assistant Angela Bartolacci for accepting the lyric contest applications and formatting the entries to enable the judging panel to be impartial. Congratulations to youth contest winner Skylar Lam from Buddhist Church of Florin and adult contest winner Gayle Kono from Sacramento Betsuin! Francis Wong and Shinji Eshima are the commissioned composers for the youth and adult categories, respectively. We also awarded honorable mention to the high school Dharma School class from Seattle Betsuin and Kerry Wong from Buddhist Church of Stockton. New Buddhist Music subcommittee members Donna Sasaki and dii Lewis will work with the honorable mention winners to produce two additional new gathas. Please learn more about Skylar Lam by reading Darlene Bagshaw's wonderful article in the September issue of the BCA *Wheel of Dharma*.

Amy also mentions in her article the BCA FBWA presentation in May at the World Buddhist Women's Conference in Kyoto. For additional details, please refer to Terri Omori's president's message on page 3 and my article on page 5 of the June issue of the BCA *Wheel of Dharma*. We are grateful to Steve Terusaki

who captured photographs and video of our BCA FBWA stage performance and video premiere of "With Gassho from the Heart". Especially remarkable is that Lady Ruzumi Ohtani can be seen looking on in the lower right corner of the photos and video! Also please note that the FBWA Music Project repository at the bottom of the BCA FBWA webpage <https://www.buddhistchurchesofamerica.org/fbwa> is available to access a more detailed project description, the musical scores, audio recordings, and the teaching video and performance video. The final video shown in Kyoto is also posted on the BCA Music YouTube channel along with an ongoing expanded gatha playlist. <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUP6bBfcX20CkMYqa3iew-I-s0RBjnvW0>

The Bonbu Stories group will share their creative process of the BCA 125th anniversary bon odori song/dance commission and premiere "The Lantern Song" project at the upcoming webinar on Saturday, October 7. (See flyer for details and registration.) We hope that temples across BCA will present our newly commissioned bon odori dances "Kangie" by Nobuko Miyamoto and this most recent new song and dance by the Bonbu Stories group during the 2024 bon odori season. Let's dance for joy!

I am grateful to all the BCA Music Committee participants and contributors who have made possible the accomplishments of the BCA Music Committee and look forward to working together to support the music elements of the BCA 125th anniversary year. We would like to acknowledge this year's donors to the BCA Music Committee, in particular a sizable donation from the estate of Yumiko Hojo which has provided us the luxury of advanced support to develop our plans for the coming year. Leanne Nishi-Wong from our Music cabinet has written up a statement and vision to support the various future projects. When we announce our sponsorship wish list for BCA 125th anniversary and beyond, we hope that BCA Music Committee can offer opportunities for anyone across the Jodo Shinshu community to contribute to ongoing projects, many of which will have an impact in perpetuity through music.



## *Donations to the BCA Music Committee, January 1 to July 31, 2023:*

Federation of Dharma School Teachers League (Bishop's Project sponsorship for the youth gatha lyric contest and commission)  
 Taiko Ventures (sponsorship for the "What is Obon?" webinar)  
 Watsonville Buddhist Temple (Coast District National Council Meeting committee in appreciation of NCM service gatha videos)  
 Charles & Darlene Bagshaw (in memory of Kenji Torigoe)  
 Allan & Nancy Hikoyeda (in memory of Yumiko Hojo)  
 Trustee of the estate of Yumiko Hojo  
 Tyler Moriguchi & Thy Pham  
 Ford & Terri Omori  
 Elinor Yokoi  
 Victoria Zhang

## **BCA Music Committee Sponsorship/Donations**

Music encompasses a wide range of emotions and genres. Writing, composing and producing utilizes talent, time, energy and resources. The BCA Music Committee has been fortunate to have volunteers and a few grants to produce music/videos, and make them available online and for use by BCA temples. Currently, there are several upcoming music projects and administrative expenses that need additional funding. If you have appreciated listening to the gathas on the BCA website or in online services, please consider donating to the BCA Music Committee. Sponsorships for commissioned projects are also available.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please use the "Contact Us" button at <https://www.buddhistchurchesofamerica.org/music>

**Thank you!**



# BONBU STORIES LANTERN SONG DEBUT *Webinar*



**REGISTER**



<https://tinyurl.com/bonbustories125th>

Join us to celebrate the debut of a new Bon Odori Song and Dance in celebration of the 125th Anniversary of BCA

**OCT. 7, 2023  
11:00 AM PACIFIC**



**TAIKOVENTURES**