



Buddhist Churches of America®  
MUSIC

# BCA Music Committee

NEWSLETTER • FEBRUARY 2024

## NW District Hoonko Weekend

By Amy Peterson,  
Oregon Buddhist Temple

**O**n January 13-14, I attended the NW District Hoonko seminar and service at the White River Buddhist Temple (WRBT). The previous District events were during Covid, and the Seattle Betsuin made them available via YouTube, live-streamed and recorded to view it at anytime.

This seminar and service were special because not only was it a memorial service for Shinran Shonin, it may have been the first time outside of Japan that gagaku, the musical instruments that originally came to Japan from China, performed the potential historic *Shuso Sango Saho* (Music Service *Shoshinge* with *Wasan* and *Nembutsu*) with live musicians at such an auspicious ceremony. Outside of Japan the gagaku music is seldom live. The guest speaker for the Seminar was Rev. Yoshimichi Ouchi from the Toronto Buddhist Temple in Canada. Fortunately for the District, Rev. Katsuya Kusunoki (Rinban of Seattle Betsuin), Rev. Tadao Koyama (Tacoma) and Rev. Ouchi (Toronto) all attended the same program at the ritual and chanting school, Gonshikishidōsho in Japan to be certified in chanting which included learning about gagaku and selecting an instrument to specialize in.

I was able to hear this music, played during chanting at the 800th Anniversary of Shinran Shonin in Kyoto last May. There you could hardly see any of the gagaku, while in White River you were so close that while you might not be able to see the instrument being played you could hear it clearly.

Rev. Kusunoki selected as his instrument the **Shō**, or Hōshō (Phoenix Bird Sho) which has 17 small bamboo pipes that are positioned in a bowl-shaped section with a mouth-piece. This resembles the folded wings of the Phoenix, or Bird of the Pure Land. Fifteen of the pipes have metal vibrators or reeds. In order to produce the desired sounds and tones one needs to place their fingers over the small holes at the bottom of each pipe. It can produce a single note or a harmony of chords. In order to keep the instrument in tune, the reeds



Rev. Kusunoki (sho), Rev. Ouchi (hichiriki), Dennis Yamashita (ryuteki), Rev. Koyama (hichiriki - hidden) with Marcia Takamura (percussion) and Esther Sugai (ryuteki) seated behind them (photo by Amy Peterson)



## BCA Music Chairperson's Message

By Kemi Nakabayashi

*The BCA 125th anniversary year has arrived!* The BCA Music Committee has been thinking ahead to this momentous year with a number of projects started in 2023 and others still being developed.

The first completed new composition from the gatha lyric writing contest and composer commission will debut later this month as part of the BCA National Council Meeting in Sacramento. We are delighted to announce that the Sacramento Betsuin choir has been learning "Amida's Light", composed by Shinji Eshima to the lyrics written by Sacramento Betsuin member Gayle M. Kono. The premiere is slated for the hybrid BCA Eitaikyo service on Sunday, February 25. Please learn more from Dennis Yamashita about Shinji Eshima in the article on page 5 of the February issue of the *BCA Wheel of Dharma*: <https://www.buddhistchurchesofamerica.org/wheel-of-dharma>. Other compositions from the contest are in various stages of creative development. Francis Wong has been working with Skylar Lam on "Storms and Peace". Donna Sasaki has been working with the Seattle Betsuin High

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## NW District Hoonko (from page 1)



**Shusho Sango Saho** presented at White River Buddhist Temple for the joint Northwest District Hoonko service on January 14, 2024 (courtesy of Joe Gotchy)

must be kept dry, and therefore Rev. Kusunoki keeps a small heater nearby to heat the Shô.

Rev. Ouchi played the double reed, bamboo instrument called **Hichiriki**, about 18 cm long with 7 finger holes on the front of the flute and two on the back side. This is the dominant sound in gagaku. The reed is made from pressed river reed. He was joined by Mika Semke. One trick to playing this instrument is keeping the reed wet and warm. Rev. Ouchi had a cup of water nearby to keep the reed hydrated and ready to be played.

The third one, a bamboo flute, **Ryuteki** was played by Rev. Tadao Koyama. He says it was the easiest to learn. But this instrument, along with the Hichiriki, plays the main melody. He was joined by a couple members of the Seattle Betsuin, Dennis Yamashita and Esther Sugai.

Kemi Nakabayashi had the special challenge of playing the electric keyboard tuned to match the gagaku instruments at 430 Hz instead of 440 Hz, sometimes leading with the music and at other times blending them together and even singing. The hidden part was putting together a choir remotely and hopefully some actually showing up in person during a cold snap with temperatures in the 20's. While an electric piano is not one of the traditional instruments,



Northwest District Singers leading the **Shusho Sango Saho Wasan**, **Nembutsu**, and **Ondokusan** eko (courtesy of Joe Gotchy)

it tied the groups together. The singers practiced in advance, and then the entire piece on Saturday and in the end it all came together.

Seattle Gagaku Group also provided some taiko drummers playing some additional instruments. Although I wasn't familiar with some of the instruments, sometimes I'd hear a familiar sound and at others I'd hear an interesting percussion sound. Percussion musicians were Esther along with Ann Ishimaru and Marcia Takamura.

I'm waiting until I repair my grandmother's Biwa, then I might consider practicing with the group. I hope you'll check out the YouTube videos so you can immerse yourself in the sounds of ancient music previously only heard by aristocrats and monks.

### Saturday Workshops:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bz-D-4rijOM>

### Sunday Service:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-qDoEV25Vc>

### For more information about the White River Buddhist Temple:

<https://www.wrbt.org>

### Basic gagaku info can be found at:

<https://gagaku.stanford.edu/en/>

## Current Sponsorship Opportunities

**Bon Daiko webinar** on 3/2/2024 to support the honorariums of the presenters Kinnara Taiko, Maui Taiko, Tiffany Tamari-buchi, Isaku Kageyama, and PJ and Roy Hirabayashi.

**Gatha recording projects:** Some of these gathas are new original compositions developed from the additional gatha lyric contestant entries with the goal of being able to present and teach the music through an available recording and lyric video.

**The Making of Kangie, a documentary video project:** Additional descriptive videography and video editing of existing footage from the recording session of Nobuko Miyamoto's bon odori song "Kangie".

For additional information please see the Music Sponsorship Opportunities on the BCA Music webpage **Music | BCA**

To confirm specific details and recognize sponsorship donations, please contact BCA Music chairperson Kemi Nakabayashi at [bcamusic@bcahq.org](mailto:bcamusic@bcahq.org)

We are otherwise deeply grateful for unrestricted donations to BCA Music Committee Endowment Foundation to support our current and future projects. Unrestricted donations may include a special dedication and can be made online through **BCA Endowment Foundation/Kindful** using the dropdown to select "Music" from "Select a campaign" options.

- Kemi Nakabayashi & Donna Sasaki

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



Shinji Eshima visiting Seattle Betsuin in May, 2018, pictured with Mas Tamekuni, leader of the Seattle Betsuin Ukulele Band. (photo by Kemi Nakabayashi)

School Dharma School class to set the youth honorable mention lyrics to music. We also anticipate a new obon gatha through the creative pairing of dii Lewis with Kerry Wong to her lyrics "Obon, Dancing under the Lights". Other contest lyric entries are being paired up with volunteer composers on the BCA Music Committee to complete new music as well.

Since the Bonbu Stories premiered the new bon odori song and dance commission for the BCA 125th anniversary "Lantern Song" through the webinar last October, a recently completed music video that includes footage submitted by BCA temples debuts this month as well. The group also plans "Lantern Song" workshops to teach the song and dance – watch for upcoming announcements of dates, times, and locations.

The featured temple for this issue of the Music Newsletter is the Palo Alto Buddhist Temple (PABT). Our content coordinators and contributing writers chose to highlight the PABT Sing-Along as well as offer a memorial tribute to Tyler Montgomery, the phenomenally talented young PABT teacher and performer who passed away unexpectedly last October. Amy Peterson has collected memories and photos to share. Please note that one of the Bonbu Stories members is Sydney Shiroyama, also from PABT, who has shared information on the Rhythmic Flow Taiko program now offered online on Wednesday afternoons.

The Bon Odori Taiko subcommittee has also developed an interesting webinar on Bon Daiko scheduled for Saturday, March 2, at 10 am Pacific Time. In

addition to the well-known presenters, this webinar will also feature a tribute to the late Rev. Hiroshi Abiko. Please see the flier for details on "Keeping the Beat" with the registration link.

Our Service Music Subcommittee co-chairpersons Misaye Abiko and Betty Fujimoto are working hard on the service music content of the BCA Founding Day Service at Buddhist Church of San Francisco on September 1, 2024 which will also be offered as a hybrid format. Please also mark the date of Sunday, September 8 if you might be in San Francisco to attend the public bon odori at Yerba Buena Gardens, the first one since the successful event in 2019 after the World Buddhist Women's Conference nearby that year. There will be more special anniversary year plans so keep an eye out for announcements in the Wheel of Dharma or in our next BCA Music Newsletter issue.

Recently, a very special Northwest District joint Hoonko program took place on January 13-14 at White River Buddhist Temple (WRBT). Minister assistant Sara Perrott from WRBT has written an article for the BCA *Wheel of Dharma*. However, Amy Peterson has also provided an informative article on the gagaku presentation of *Shuso Sango Saho* (Music Service Shoshinge) in this newsletter. Please also note the details of the flier received from the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii announcing the plan to publish and sell the 5th edition of *Praises of the Buddha* gatha book.

Lastly, we acknowledge the generous donations to the BCA Music Committee received in 2023. If you have enjoyed listening to the gathas on the BCA Music web page or in online services, please consider donating to the BCA Music Committee through the Music option on the Kindful link: <https://bca.kindful.com/> We also welcome sponsorship donations for BCA 125th anniversary year events and projects. If you wish to direct sponsorship to a specific event or project, we have prepared a "wish list" announcement on the BCA Music webpage: <https://www.buddhistchurchesofamerica.org/music>

I am happy to confirm with anyone interested how to designate the donation if you prefer rather than for unrestricted use for our future BCA Music projects.



### *Donations to the BCA Music Committee, January 1 to December 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)  
 Irene Goto  
 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  
 Kemi Nakabayashi & Jim Norton  
 Ford & Terri Omori  
 Elinor Yokoi  
 Victoria Zhang

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## Palo Alto's Music Flows Through the BCA

By Amy Peterson



Gary Sakamoto, DJ Extraordinaire

### Sing-Along with Gary

Palo Alto Buddhist Temple (PABT) must have music blowing and flowing in the trees, through the Hondo and all around the grounds. PABT music experiences have created an oasis for many Sangha members prior to and expanded during the Covid shut down. The Board members, Rev. Dean Koyama, and their musically talented Sangha members not only found a way to keep their music connection active during Covid, through Zoom meetings, but they also shared it with the rest of the BCA.

Somehow I found this music oasis connection with Gary Sakamoto, who leads a Zoom Sing-Along on Thursday evenings. A variety of people join Gary on Thursday nights including Mrs. Etsuko Yano who celebrated her 101st Birthday this past year during our weekly Sing-Along. Other Sing-Along participants include Sangha members from Palo Alto, South to San Diego, East to Colorado and the Midwest, and North to Portland and Seattle and sometimes even from Japan. My grandkids have even been seen on Zoom dancing to the music and pets have been known to photobomb or dance to the music.

Participants are encouraged to send suggestions to Gary who then designs a program to teach, entertain, and also for us to sing along. When I started attending the Sing-Along, Gary was going through the year's top 10 songs. We go through the holiday songs, rising stars both here and in Japan, local musicians; especially temple members, music from the temples in-

cluding newly released gathas performed at Conferences like World Buddhist Women's Association this year in Kyoto where "Gassho from the Heart" (lyrics by Rene Maruyama and music by Donna Sasaki) was performed and introduced to BCA members.

Other contributions include private recordings that include Sing-Along participants, jokes and trivia to fill in the set up time. Cynthia Mee even sent Eric Quock a joke book to up his game.

I am hoping this will continue for as long as Gary, PABT, and the other members participate.

#### Participant comments:

Aiko Yamamoto describes the following: "Gary Sakamoto - PABT Wednesday Sing-Along, providing Temple senior group with his talent, plus Thursday night Sing Along = 'disk jockey extraordinaire'. His time and research results in fun, informative nights." Aiko calls



Erick Quock  
Master of Comic  
Relief & Trivia

"Eric Quock - Our 'comic relief' throughout the years, audience moan & groan reactions to his jokes."

"Thank you Gary for all the time and effort you put into the sing-along each week! I feel we have


a wonderful Thursday night family that I look forward to seeing every week! I love all the new groups and singers that you introduce us to with so many interesting and fun facts and old favorites too. I'm singing loudly and so appreciate the mute button! Wishing everyone a happy and healthy 2024! Thank you, Gary, for all your support to the Palo Alto Temple!" –Dean and Linda

"Thank you Gary for all the work you do to give us a fantastic Thursday of a variety of songs. I look forward to it each week. Palo Alto has a great Sangha!" –Marlene

"I look forward to Thursday evenings and seeing my Sing-Along friends and

learning whatever Gary has prepared – various aspects of music unknown to me and listening/singing to music that take me back in time. Thanks, Gary."

– Cynthia Mee

"I was a late-joiner to the group, but would also like to thank Gary for continuing to make Thursday evenings so enjoyable!!!" –Jim 

I, and many others, hope Thursday Night Sing-Alongs will continue for years to come and that Gary will continue to create interesting programs, and PABT members and others members continue to contribute their ideas, and laugh together. (If you want to join us some time just Join Zoom Meeting Thursday night 7:00 PT, check the PABT website <https://www.pabt.org/announcements>)

### Tyler Montgomery

Through the Sing-Along I was introduced to Tyler Montgomery, a multi-talented young man at PABT. Tyler loved music and helped temple members, mostly senior women, to play the ukulele. Again PABT supported the ukulele classes using its Zoom account to bring the ukulele people together.

Unfortunately, Tyler Montgomery suddenly departed this life due to an aortic aneurysm on October 28, 2023, at the age of 34.

<https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/legacyremembers/tyler-montgomery-obituary?id=53617673>

To summarize his obituary he learned to play the saxophone while a young boy. It appears his passion for music blossomed at a young age. Tyler learned other instruments making friends along the way. He learned the guitar, piano, ukulele, drums and vocals. At age 13, Tyler co-founded the band Bad Karma, which continued as a jazz and classic rock group for over two decades. He also founded his high school band, The Doppler Effect, winning a Battle of the Bands at UC Berkeley.

Tyler attended PABT along with his parents Wayne and Denise, brother Wes and sister Kristin. Tyler spent years volunteering at the Palo Alto Buddhist Temple. He taught Dharma School and

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## Montgomery (from page 4)

gave ukulele lessons to church seniors.

I took the ukulele class and was very bad at remembering the correct time for the class. I usually signed on late. I didn't have all of the music and although we never met, he was so supportive, sending me the sheet music and giving suggestions on how I could catch up.

Kemi Nakabayashi, chairperson of the BCA Music Committee, grew up with PABT as her home temple and considers herself fortunate that the PABT choir included her as an honorary member when

they practiced and participated in the Choir Fests in Sacramento and Mountain View. She reports that Tyler assisted Alice Fukushima and Amy Yoshida with conducting duties and instrumental accompaniment.

Alice and Amy clarify, "Tyler sang with our choir in his early Dharma School years but eventually he became one of our musical accompanists. He started out playing guitar but evolved by deciding whatever instrument he felt was needed, so though primarily he played guitar, sometimes he'd play drums, another time it was saxophone, and other times it was ukulele. He knew no limits, even filling in as choir director whenever asked. We always got the best from Tyler. He knew no other way."

At the PABT on August 5-6, 2023, Bad Karma gave their always well received bon odori weekend performance. Tyler also participated in bon taiko for the dancing. Kemi is grateful for the chance to have seen Tyler then and to personally thank him for teaching her ukulele through the pandemic over Zoom. Kemi recalls "Auld Lang Syne" was taught at what would be the last Zoom ukulele class in October. Tyler had agreed to perform at the PABT Bonenkai year-end luncheon for seniors in December. Joanne Chow, organizer of the Zoom



Tyler Montgomery at the PABT Good CARma Car Show on September 23, 2023 (courtesy of Sue Luttner)

ukulele class, then asked Aiko Yamamoto to contact PABT ukulele players to request they perform at Bonenkai per Tyler's wishes. This was previous to his passing. Subsequently Aiko was able to recruit all past players in honor of Tyler, saying, "Everyone I called agreed to play. There was not one person that declined." Ultimately, the group presented "Auld Lang Syne" at the event. Aiko relates "It was a tribute for Tyler's teachings and as a person to play in his memory. We will

miss him!"

The remaining members of Bad Karma performed at Tyler's memorial service with a beautiful rendition of Queen's "No One But You".

Tyler was a valuable music contributor to BCA. Even though I never met Tyler in person, only via Zoom, he touched my life in many ways. As the song reminds us, "Only the Good Die Young."

Cynthia Mee says, "Life events and people are interconnected. The music blowing from the Palo Alto Buddhist Temple trees connects us wherever we are, whether we are young or old, whether we sing and/or play the ukulele or just enjoy listening. Music is an important part of our temples, sanghas, and friendships."

We can thank Bishop Harada for encouraging music to be a vital part of BCA, to Kemi Nakabayashi for her leadership of the BCA Music Committees, and to sangha members like Gary and Tyler for their open arms like the Buddha.

Tyler's death is a reminder of how precious life is and not to take it for granted. I will remember him in Gassho whenever I hear a ukulele.

**Namu Amida Butsu.**

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## Rhythmic Flow Taiko starts on February 21st

Submitted by Sydney Shiroyama

Rhythmic Flow Taiko is a virtual taiko class designed to promote physical, cognitive, and social engagement for older adults. The class was created in 2020 by Sydney Shiroyama (Occupational Therapist), Vivian Lee (Physical Therapist), and Yeeman "ManMan" Mui (taiko artist and educator) after they recognized the therapeutic potential of taiko for people with Parkinson's Disease. By practicing taiko, participants engage in large amplitude movements, full extensions, trunk rotation, variation of volume and tempo, forceful vocalizations, and cognitive challenges.

While the class was originally designed for people with Parkinson's Disease, it has proven to be fun and beneficial for a wide range of participants. Everyone is welcome to participate! The classes will be held on zoom on Wednesdays from 3-4 p.m.; Pacific Time. There will be a six week session that starts on February 21 (class dates: 2/21, 2/28, 3/6, 3/13, 3/20, and 3/27). No experience is necessary and participants can use materials from their home, such as a pillow for a drum surface and wooden spoons as drumsticks.

You can register at  
**RhythmicFlowTaiko.org**

If you have questions or concerns, email  
**RhythmicFlowTaiko@gmail.com**

# Keeping the Beat:

A Bon Daiko Webinar Featuring Kinnara Taiko, Maui Taiko, Tiffany Tamaribuchi, and Isaku Kageyama



Tiffany Tamaribuchi



Isaku Kageyama

The “Keeping the Beat” webinar will feature a panel discussion on Bon Daiko (Obon drumming) with Kinnara Taiko, Maui Taiko, Tiffany Tamaribuchi, and Isaku Kageyama. The webinar will include a short history of Bon Daiko and a tribute to Reverend Hiroshi Abiko. Developed by the BCA Music Bon Odori/Taiko Subcommittee and co-sponsored by the Center for Buddhist Education.

**Saturday, March 2, 2024**  
**10:00 - 11:15 a.m. (PST)**



Kinnara Taiko



Maui Taiko

**Registration: <https://bit.ly/bondaikowebinar>**



## New Gatha Book Coming!

The 2024 Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii (HHMH) Triple Celebration theme is **“Sharing the Joy of Nembutsu Together: Our Living Heart of Gratitude.”** As music enhances the joy of hearing the Nembutsu Teachings, HHMH is most pleased to announce the publication of the **5<sup>th</sup> edition of Praises of the Buddha** to commemorate the **Triple Celebration** in September 2024. This volume replaces the 4<sup>th</sup> edition (1990) but will retain many beloved gathas in Japanese and English and will add many beautiful gathas that reflect the creative efforts of HHMH members in Hawaii.



- Half of the gathas in the **5<sup>th</sup> edition Praises of the Buddha** are new to this gatha book. Included in the total of 152 gathas are 54 English and 22 Japanese favorites from the 4<sup>th</sup> edition (1990), 38 wonderful English gathas composed by members of HHMH temples, and 38 appealing English renditions of Japanese gathas produced by the Translation Subcommittee of the HHMH Music Committee.
- The page dimensions have been increased to 7" X 9" to encourage larger font size whenever possible and thus, increased readability. The book will be a soft cover volume, approximately 225 pages, and is expected to be priced at about \$15 per copy.
- If your BCA temple is anticipating purchasing copies in bulk (over 25), please e-mail us at [hqbooks@honpahi.org](mailto:hqbooks@honpahi.org) by **April 30, 2024** and let us know of your interest so that sufficient copies may be printed to meet your need. Single copy purchases by individuals may be made from the HHMH Bookstore once the books become available toward the end of this year.