



# BCA Music Committee

NEWSLETTER • JULY 2024



TS/DBT Choir with younger participation (photo courtesy of Richard Yoshida)

## Happenings: Tri-State/Denver Buddhist Temple Choir

By Richard Yoshida,  
Tri-State/Denver Buddhist Temple

The TS/DBT Choir is back in the swing, post-COVID, and participating in approximately 10 special services a year, including Hanamatsuri, Ho-Onko, Nehan-E and Eitaikyo. However, we have had a significant challenge in maintaining a core group in the last few years and are aware that other temples have also faced this dilemma. We have kept our entire emailing list and pass along information, especially our weekly temple schedule and of planned choir performances. We advertise and encourage others to join. Lately, we have welcomed Jr.YBA and younger Dharma School students to join us. Not only has this helped with service presentations, but the young proudly feel a sense of contribution to the Sangha.



Choir luncheon prior to COVID (photo courtesy of Richard Yoshida)



## BCA Music Chairperson's Message

By Kemi Nakabayashi

With the Obon season underway, the BCA Music Committee offers this summer issue to publicize bon odori activities. There is also much Music Committee news since the February issue, notably from the BCA National Council Meeting later that month. An article summarizing the many contributions from BCA Music Committee during the National Council Meeting and BCA Eitaikyo Service in Sacramento is included.

Personally, special music-related opportunities in April included dinner with relatives at Yoshino's in Fresno on a Saturday evening when Gordon Ah Tye, dedicated sangha leader and frequent keyboard musician at Fresno Betsuin, provided music. His stamina for playing endless requests was



Gordon Ah Tye performing at Yoshino's Japanese Restaurant in Fresno (photo by Kemi Nakabayashi)

An event that was suspended during the COVID crisis is a yearly luncheon for our choir members. This event adds enthusiasm and camaraderie, and we plan to resume this activity soon. And of course, we all enjoy the delicious food.

Another project we have accomplished is the creation of a choir-backed slide show, with the Gatha, "Namo Amida Butsu," written and introduced by the Cherry Blossomz, a popular group within the BCA.

On Memorial Days, the choir alternates with the Simpson United Methodist Church (SUMC) Choir to sing at the Fairmount Cemetery in Denver. We sing at a ceremony to honor

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**TS/DBT Choir** (from page 1)



Combined Choir Singing at Fairmount Cemetery's Memorial Day Service (photo courtesy of Richard Yoshida)



TS/DBT Choir Singing Fukushima Ondo at 2018 Obon Odori (photo courtesy of Richard Yoshida)

our World War II veterans who sacrificed greatly for our freedom and place in society. Our latest presentation included the singing of "Hana wa Saku" (Flowers Will Bloom), which is a nationally acclaimed, NHK sponsored song that was written in remembrance of the thousands that lost their lives in the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. In that service the TS/DBT Choir sang with SUMC to both Japanese and English lyrics.

We are planning to return to an alternating year format so that choir members may, on Memorial Day, visit various cemeteries, which are scattered in several sites in the Colorado area.

Our choir is also an integral part in our yearly Obon Odori.

We participate in the "Fukushima Ondo" where we sing and chant our hearts out, synchronizing with the dancing and beat of taiko drums by a local taiko group.

Finally, head minister Rev. Nari Hayashi would like us to perform a musical chant during our 2025 Ho-Onko service. This is in the conceptual phase at the present. We know that this type of sutra presentation may be a challenge, but we are confident that Rev. Hayashi's suggestions and coaching will lead us to success.

We are a small group, but we strive to build on what we have. A recruiting campaign is one item we need to consider if we are to maintain and continue to grow as a significant part of our Sangha.

**Maintaining the Tradition of Shigin**

By Kemi Nakabayashi, Seattle Betsuin

**B**CA Emeritus Rev. Zuikei Taniguchi, Tsunetoshi Akimoto, and Nancy Kubota welcomed Aiko Yamamoto and me to observe their *shigin* class on April 8 at Buddhist Temple of Alameda. Rev. Taniguchi resumed *shigin* practice last year after a hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On the day of our visit, he led a special short Hanamatsuri music service before the class. *Shigin* is a traditional art form of reciting and singing poetry with a rich history. We learned that the poetry typically describes nature and is not Buddhist per se, but practicing *shigin* was an



activity that many Issei had organized at various Buddhist temples.

In the East Bay, devoted teachers of *shigin* included Nancy's father Shoji

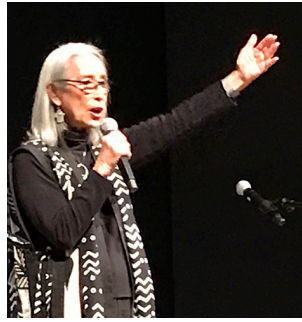
Nancy Kubota, Tsunetoshi Akimoto, Rev. Zuikei Taniguchi, and Kemi Nakabayashi on Hanamatsuri day 2024 at Buddhist Temple of Alameda (photo by Aiko Yamamoto)

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**Chairperson’s Message** (from page 1)

remarkable and made for a fun evening. In addition, since BCA Emeritus Rev. Zuikei Taniguchi, resumed *shigin* (Japanese chanted poetry) practice at Buddhist Temple of Alameda after a hiatus during the COVID-19 pandemic, I was able to join and observe on April 8. He led a short special music Hanamatsuri service before the class. Though not Buddhist per se, *shigin* was an activity that many Issei had organized at various Buddhist temples.

Back in Seattle, Nobuko Miyamoto came to present an Eco-Sangha seminar “Dancing in a Circle: The Environmental Buddhism of Nobuko Miyamoto”. In January, when I contacted her to let her know about the arson fire at Seattle Betsuin and our plan to find an alternate venue for the seminar, she graciously offered to have a fund-raising concert. Through Dr. Jason Wirth, professor of psychology at Seattle University, the venues for the concert and the seminar were secured there. Nobuko’s book *Not Yo’ Butterfly* (<https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520380653/not-yo-butterfly>) and her recording *120,000 Stories* (<https://folkways.si.edu/nobuko-miyamoto/120000-stories>) were the basis for the concert. Nobuko has been a vital member of the Bon Odori Taiko subcommittee, creating the bon odori song and dance “Kangie” in 2022 and mentoring the Bonbu Stories group during the process of creating “Lantern Song”. Read more about Nobuko from her website “Herstory” (<https://www.nobukomiyamoto.org/herstory>)  
A documentary film *A Song in*



Nobuko Miyamoto sharing some of her 120,000 Stories (photo by Kemi Nakabayashi)

*Movement* recently premiered in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, and Houston. We look forward to future additional film screenings to share in the tribute of Nobuko’s amazing life journey.

Recently posted historical articles by Wynn Kiyama in *Discover Nikkei* are also notable about the original taiko drummers in the mainland United States. <https://discovernikkei.org/en/journal/author/kiyama-wynn/>

For this year’s bon odori season, we are encouraging all temples to present the BCA Music Committee commissioned dances “Lantern Song” and “Kangie”. Show us your temple’s participation by submitting video clips for a collaborative video project. We are also requesting video footage of “Tanko Bushi” to appreciate the range of versions across BCA districts of this classic bon odori dance.

Thank you again to the Music Committee donors recognized in this issue. We appreciate fully funding the Bon Daiko webinar to properly support the panel presenters and share the edited webinar video on the BCA Music YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgzyC7KZYu-A&t=2150s>



**BONBU STORIES**

If you are in the Los Angeles area on Saturday, July 6, join Bonbu Stories performing live at the Senshin Buddhist Temple’s Obon!

<https://senshintemple.org/obon/>



**Donations to the BCA Music Committee  
January 1 to May 31, 2024**

- Shinji Eshima
- Wendy Hamai (Bon Daiko webinar)
- Shannon Heartwood
- Allan & Nancy Hikoyeda (in memory of Rev. Hiroshi Abiko)
- Ann Ong (Bon Daiko webinar)
- Nishi-Wong Family (in honor of Mary Kato – Happy 100th birthday! for Bon Daiko webinar)
- Dan and Christine Kubo (for Bonbu Stories live events)
- Alex Sakamoto (Bon Daiko webinar)



Nobuko Miyamoto and Francis Wong performing at Seattle University (photo by Kemi Nakabayashi)

## Music Elements of the BCA National Council Meeting and BCA Eitaikyo Service – February 23-25, 2024

By Kemi Nakabayashi, BCA Music Committee Chairperson

The many facets of music presented at the BCA National Council Meeting (NCM) and BCA Eitaikyo Service in February at the Buddhist Church of Sacramento were possible through much preparation and coordinated effort. The key members of the NCM planning committee were Myra Okasaki, Koichi Mizushima, and Terri Omori working with the NCM co-chairs Allen Yamashiro and Peggy Okabayashi with Rev. Yuki Sugahara, Rev. Marvin Harada, and Rev. Michael Endo.

With appreciation to Stuart Ito for videotaping the Sacramento Betsuin Choir, two pre-recorded gatha videos were prepared for the NCM opening service on Friday, February 23 and the NCM service on Saturday, February 24. “Hear the Ringing Temple Bell” with subtitle “Temple Life after Covid-19” composed by Donna Sasaki was an appropriate selection to celebrate the first in-person NCM since 2020. “On-dokusan II” was prepared for the Saturday morning service. Both gathas were directed by Rod Nishikawa with piano accompaniment by Myra Okasaki. These pre-recorded videos are now available on the BCA Music YouTube channel. <https://www.youtube.com/@buddhistchurchesofamericam9267/videos>

During the NCM, the BCA Music Committee report included the premiere of the music video of “Lantern Song” by the Bonbu Stories group, which was commissioned as the BCA 125th anniversary bon odori song and dance. This music video included clips of various BCA temple bon



Bonbu Stories dancing “Lantern Song”  
(photo courtesy of Bonbu Stories)



Grateful Crane Ensemble members, Marv Maruyama, Keiko Kawashima, Haruye Ioka, and Ping Wu perform at the NCM evening banquet. (photo courtesy of Catherine Fujimori)

odori events. It was released also on the Bonbu Stories YouTube channel the same day as the NCM premiere viewing on February 24 with over 1,000 YouTube views during the first week! “Lantern Song” can be found on the BCA Music YouTube site:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLUP6bBfcX20Cy2ffb-ZWrOyZHzrKlmp8c4>

In addition, another special new video project of the BCA Music Committee was premiered during the BCA NCM, “Nembutsu” by Chizuko Iwanaga performed by Otonowa with commentary introduction by band leader Akira Tana, son of the late Rev. Daisho Tana.

Soji Kashiwagi, the executive director and playwright of the Grateful Crane Ensemble, prepared a spirited show chronicling the history of the

Buddhist Churches of America that premiered during the NCM Saturday evening banquet entertainment. Musical selections were sung by the Grateful Crane Ensemble performers, Merv Maruyama, Keiko Kawashima, Haruye Ioka, and Ping Wu, along with background music accompanying the dialogue. Original instrumental recorded compositions by Albert Fujitsubo (Central Cal district music group) and recorded piano accompaniments of familiar gathas were included and acknowledged, recorded by Elaine Jones (San Jose Betsuin) and Rev. Patti Oshita (Sacramento Betsuin). The final number was a rousing rendition of “Namo Amida Butsu”, composed by the Cherry Blossomz group, sung in 4-part harmony by the performers.

The BCA Eitaikyo Service on Sunday, February 25 featured the special chanting of *Kanmuryojukyo Saho*, a ritual on the Contemplation Sutra. The Sacramento Betsuin Choir also prepared and presented the premiere of “Amida’s Light” by Shinji Eshima, set to lyrics of Gayle M. Kono. Kono, a member of Sacramento Betsuin, was the service organist for the occasion and was

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## Tradition of *Shigin* (from page 2)

Kubota who taught weekly *shigin* classes for many years, at one point two classes of up to 12 people. Mr. Kubota was the last Issei *shigin* instructor for the Oakland/Alameda group. Although the class numbers have greatly decreased due to the dwindling number of native Japanese speakers in the Bay Area, Rev. Taniguchi has dedicated himself to continue the practice of *shigin*. He spends hours translating Japanese notation to English and *romaji* for his two students. Nancy Kubota, a member of Berkeley Higashi Honganji temple, is grateful for Rev. Taniguchi's dedication in order to continue the tradition of *shigin*.

For many decades, seven *Shodokai shigin* groups in northern California were led by Issei leaders in Salinas, San Jose, Mountain View, Palo Alto, San Mateo, Oakland, and Sacramento. Aiko Yamamoto, a member of Palo Alto Buddhist Temple, remembers her father practicing *shigin* with the Palo Alto group. Dennis Akizuki, our BCA Music newsletter editorial advisor, recalls that his grandfather was part of the San Jose *shigin* group and remembers hearing him practice quite often.

The groups met annually for a performance gathering *Shodokai Shunki Shigin Onshu-Kai taikai*. Now just Salinas, Palo Alto, Oakland/Alameda, and Sacramento have small active groups

and plan to convene with some participants from southern California for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic on September 14th at Buddhist Temple of Alameda. Rev. Taniguchi explained that they try to sing with the feeling to express the scenery and receive the spirit of the writer through singing *shigin*. Additional information on *shigin* is provided here:  
<https://japantoday.com/category/features/lifestyle/shigin-a-truly-beautiful-art-form-with-a-rich-history%20>



## Music Elements of the NCM (from page 4)



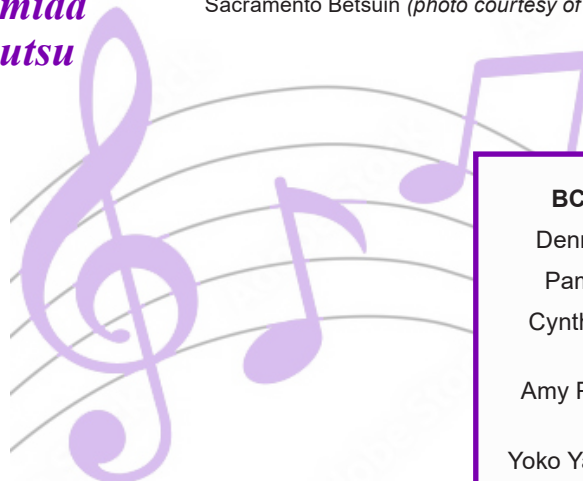
Sacramento Betsuin Choir, conducted by Rod Nishikawa  
 (photo courtesy of Catherine Fujimori)



Terri Omori, Shinji Eshima, Kemi Nakabayashi, Gayle Kono, Myra Okasaki, and Steve Terusaki after the BCA Eitaikyo Service at the Sacramento Betsuin (photo courtesy of Catherine Fujimori)

acknowledged with Eshima by Rev. Endo after the choir performance of the second gatha "Shinshu Shuka." "Amida's Light" is scored for choir with soprano and flute solo and piano accompaniment. Sue Ann Kashiwagi was the vocal soloist with flutist Bruce Mahon and Okasaki on piano. Nishikawa conducted "Amida's Light" while Karen Adachi directed "Shinshu Shuka." The full service video is available on the Buddhist Churches of America YouTube channel recorded livestream <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRgyKckIkh0&t=4172s> as well as the separate gatha videos posted to the BCA Music YouTube channel. With much appreciation to Sacramento Betsuin Choir for the hours of rehearsal time to learn the new music for the very special musical offerings.

## Namo Amida Butsu



### BCA MUSIC NEWSLETTER

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# OBON dance

**“LANTERN SONG”, “KANGIE” & “TANKO BUSHI”**  
video submission request



Bonbu Stories - “Lantern Song” (photo by Luke Uyeda)



Nobuko Miyamoto - “Kangie” (courtesy of Nobuko Miyamoto)

Please share videos of your temple Sangha dancing “Lantern Song,” “Kangie” and “Tanko Bushi” during your obon. We will be presenting collaborative videos of these three dances during the BCA Founding Day Telethon and would like to include as many temple video clips as possible. The Telethon will take place on September 1st on the BCA YouTube Channel.

(<https://www.youtube.com/@BuddhistChurchesofAmerica/streams>)



Buddhist Churches of America®  
MUSIC

**Please use this form to submit your video:**

<https://forms.gle/EJ3MyhLRmTKYk1Bu9>

**Deadline for submissions: July 31**

For temples with Bon Odori events in August,  
the deadline is August 15.



# AMERICAN BON ODORI: *Dancing in Joy and Remembrance*

A COMMEMORATIVE CULTURAL ARTS SERIES PRESENTED BY AMERICAN BON CONSORTIUM

ALL EVENTS FREE & OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

## GALLERY EXHIBIT

**July 1 – September 30, 2024 • NJAHS Japantown Peace Gallery**

1684 Post Street (near Buchanan), San Francisco

**Hours:** 12pm–5pm, Mon–Fri & 1st Sat/month, and Sun 9/1 & Mon 9/2 (Labor Day)

The tradition of Obon dancing (Bon odori) is presented in a multimedia exhibit curated by Dr. Wynn Kiyama and Jane Suiei Naito. Archival photos, rare films and artifacts present the vibrant history of Obon dancing in the continental United States from the 1930s, through the World War II mass incarceration of Japanese Americans, the postwar years, and into the 21st century. It also commemorates the 125th anniversary of the Buddhist Churches of America, founded in 1899, here in San Francisco.

Photo: SF Civic Center, 1974, BCA 75th Anniversary Book



## SATURDAY WORKSHOPS: July 6, Aug. 3 & Sept. 7

**1 – 2 pm at NJAHS Peace Gallery**

Bon dance stories and crafts for all ages. Register online.

**7/6:** Make your own Uchiwa fan with Jane Suiei Naito

**8/3:** Design your own Tenugui towel with Reiko Iwanaga (Hanayagi Reimichi)

**9/7:** “The Magic of Dancing Obon” Dance and talk with Nobuko Miyamoto,

Bon dance creator, activist & cultural icon. Moderator: Dr. Wynn Kiyama



Presented in partnership with

**National Japanese American Historical Society (NJAHS)**

For details, scan the QR code, call (415) 921-5007 or visit

[www.njajs.org/events](http://www.njajs.org/events)

*Dancing in Joy and Remembrance*  
**AMERICAN BON DANCING**

**Sunday, September 8, 2024, 1 – 3 pm**

**Yerba Buena Gardens - Great Lawn**

Mission Street between 3rd & 4th Streets, San Francisco

Join the Bon dance circle – no experience needed! Obon (A Gathering of Joy) invites us to “just dance,” as we remember those who have passed and enjoy the present together.



Celebrate the 125th Anniversary of the Buddhist Churches of America with new dances commissioned by the BCA Music Committee:

“Kangie” (Gathering of Joy) by  
**Nobuko Miyamoto**



“Lantern Song” by  
**Bonbu Stories**

Miharu Okamura, Sydney Shiroyama,  
Miko Shudo, Kendall Tani, Vicky Zhang,  
and Emily (Yoshihara) Imazumi



*Plus, New and Traditional Works:*

“Ei Ja Nai Ka” by  
**PJ Hirabayashi/TaikoPeace**  
**San Jose Taiko**

**Ensohza Folk Music Ensemble**

*Bon Dance Coordinator:*

**Reiko Iwanaga (Hanayagi Reimichi)**



PHOTOGRAPHY: MARK SHIGENAGA



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[ybgfestival.org/event/american-bon-dancing-2024](http://ybgfestival.org/event/american-bon-dancing-2024)

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