



COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
Center for Buddhist
Studies

Community Wellness



Contemporary Buddhist Music: Community Wellness Digest Vol. 2, No. 4 (April 2023)

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Welcome to the Center for Buddhist Studies Community Wellness Digest!

In this monthly email, we share wisdom from Buddhist teachings you can use in your daily life, wellness tips, and information about university and community events. After a successful launch in Spring 2021, we are expanding the newsletter with a team of expert contributors and new sections. Each month will feature a theme--this month we explore **Contemporary Buddhist Music**.

The opinions expressed in the books, articles, and websites referenced in this newsletter are those of the original authors and publishers, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Center for Buddhist Studies, the editors, the editorial board, or the organization to which the authors are affiliated. If you have questions concerning these opinions, please contact the original authors and their publishers.

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Wellness Newsletter.

Let us know what you think by emailing buddhist-studies@email.arizona.edu. Enjoying the newsletter? Hit the buttons below and share it with your network.

Sincerely,
Jiang Wu
Director, Center for Buddhist Studies



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BUDDHIST CHANTING

Imagine walking into a Buddhist temple, and what do you hear? Perhaps your ears perceive the low, monotone sounds of Zen monks intoning the Heart Sutra or devotees in the Theravadan tradition reciting the Three Refuges. Many Buddhist chants have traditionally been sung in unison with very little melody or accompaniment.

In recent years, however, various practitioners around the globe have begun experimenting with modern arrangements of Buddhist chants. Videos on Youtube include choirs singing chants with layered melodic lines and modern pop instrumental accompaniments. In this edition of the Community Wellness Newsletter, we explore a few select examples of contemporary Buddhist music. With the help of the internet and social media, these renditions welcome new generations of Buddhists and others to engage with the Dharma through novel musical languages.

A VOICE FROM THE HEART
一葉心聲

A SPECIAL CONCERT CELEBRATING MASTER
YINYUAN LONGQI (1592-1673) 隱元隆琦

This special concert highlights Yinyuan's poetic talent and deep spirituality.

Program:
1. Leaf from the West 一葉西風 (In Chinese)
2. The Heart Sutra 般若心經 いろは歌 (In Japanese)
3. Master Preventing Dharma 和光 (In Chinese)
4. Praising the Buddha 贊佛偈 (In Chinese)
5. Gazing at Mount Fuji from the Nakayama Ridge 中
山望富士山 (In Chinese)
6. The Heart Sutra 般若心經 (Obaku Chanting Style)
7. Evergreen 在明 (In Ming-dynasty Chinese)
8. Hand 手 (In Japanese)
9. The Great Compassion Dharani 大悲咒 (In Chinese)

SINGER:
KANHO YAKUSHIJI

FEB. 4, 2023, 6 PM (ARIZONA TIME)

VIEWING PLATFORM:
CENTER FOR BUDDHIST STUDIES
YOUTUBE CHANNEL, FACEBOOK, ZOOM

To receive a link to view the concert, please scan QR code and sign up for our email list ->

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
Center for Buddhist Studies

KANHO YAKUSHIJI AND JAPANESE ZEN MUSIC

On Saturday, February 4, 2023, the Center hosted a special concert featuring Ven. Kanho Yakushiji, a Japanese Zen monk and musician known for his heartfelt renditions of traditional Zen sutras. The premiere event was titled **A Voice from the Heart 一葉心聲: A Special Concert Celebrating Master Yinyuan Longqi 隱元隆琦 (1592-1673)**.

You can watch the concert by clicking the link above or click [here](#).

Click [here](#) for a program and more information.

In the summer of 2016, Ven. Kanho Yakushiji shot to prominence with a video of a live performance of his arrangement of the Heart Sutra. Appearing on stage in traditional monk robes, he soulfully sings the familiar words of the sutra surrounded by a rock band and accompanied by a choir, acoustic guitar, and gentle electronic music. The Youtube video has over 3.8 million views and counting, and his band has toured across Japan and China.

Watch "The Heart Sutra":



With this unique marriage of modern pop music and ancient chanting, Ven. Yakushiji created something that resonated with audiences beyond the visitors to his family's temple. But the road to reach that harmonious mixing of ancient and modern, traditional and innovative, had been long and winding.

In his 20s, Ven. Yakushiji played in a rock band that was signed to a major label. He thought of himself as a musician, viewing his Buddhist family tradition as a separate part of his life. After a chance encounter with an older man at a concert changed his perceptions, he began to see that “the space between the past and the future, my paths as a monk and as a musician, duty and desire, weren't quite so far apart. I realized all is one. It wasn't until

then that I saw how singing and Buddhism may be similar.” (Quoted in an [interview](#) with Koshin Paley Ellison in Tricycle Magazine).

After training in the Rinzai tradition in Kyoto, Ven. Yakushiji took on the role of deputy director of Kaizenji temple in Imabari, in Japan’s Ehime Prefecture. He continues the long tradition of temple caretaking in his family as the sixteenth generation to hold this position.

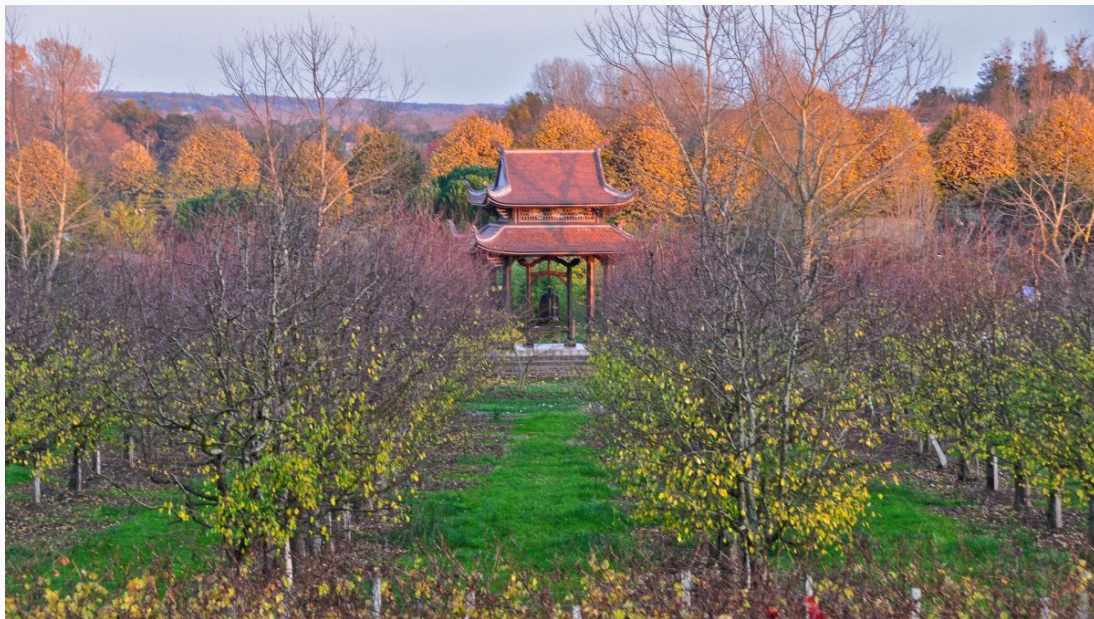
Ven. Yakushiji has released numerous albums, including "Heart Sutra" from 2018, "The Prayer" from 2020 and "Shurangama Mantra" in 2022. His music videos feature images of Ven. Yakushiji and collaborators chanting in Zen temples around Japan.

Ven. Yakushiji’s music can be found on various outlets:

[Spotify](#)

[Youtube](#)

[Official website](#)



Plum Village Choir

When the late Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh founded Plum Village in southwest France in the early 1980s, the community became a meeting place for East and West. Early in the process of establishing the mindfulness practices and daily rhythms of Plum Village, Ven. Hanh was inspired to weave music into the chanting, with special awareness of music’s appeal to young people. As he recounted later in his life:

“I thought that children needed to sing; that chanting alone was not enough. I intended to write the song, ‘I take refuge in the Buddha, the one who shows me the way in this life...’ for the children. One afternoon we did sitting meditation in the Bamboo Hall. The walls are made of stone. Facing a big block of stone, the tune for the song came to me...I thought, ‘If it’s going to be like this, I might as well compose the song now.’ So I continued writing that song and, after the meditation, I recorded it in order not to forget it.” (Excerpted from a transcribed [dharma talk](#) “I have arrived, I am home”).

Today, the Plum Village Choir records audio and video versions of Buddhist chants sung by a large choir of monks and nuns accompanied by guitar, Western stringed instruments, and drums interwoven with traditional Buddhist bells and gongs.

Watch Ven. Hanh leading the Plum Village Choir in a 2014 offering of the "Namo Avalokiteshvaraya" Chant of compassion:



After Ven. Hanh strikes the bell several times, a plucked guitar accompaniment introduces a simple, beautiful melody played on a violin. Drums keep the beat as the choir enters singing the words of the chant set to the violin’s melody. The chant is “invoked as a prayer, continuously repeated for twenty minutes, in order to awaken the energy of compassion in us all and transmit it to all living beings” (from the Youtube video description).

The chants and songs of Plum Village are available on the website and on Youtube:

[Chants](#)

ANI CHOYING DROLMA AND TIBETAN BUDDHIST MUSIC

Ani Choying Drolma is a Nepalese Buddhist nun and musician of Tibetan origin. She trained in the Nagi Gompa Nunnery in Nepal with Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche and came to worldwide attention after recording chants and songs with American guitarist and composer Steve Tibbetts in the 1990s. Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, his wife, and the resident chant master were her earliest music teachers.

To date, Ani Choying Drolma has released more than 20 albums and has performed around the world. In addition to starting her own foundation, she established the Nun's Welfare Foundation and Star of Hope Project with the goal of increasing access to free education for young girls and boys in Nepal. She has served as UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador to Nepal from 2014-2019, and received the 2017 Atlantic Council Freedom Award.

Her video "Namo Ratna Mantra" (Great Compassion Mantra) from her "Inner Peace 1" album of 2021 has 2.6 million views on Youtube and counting.

Watch Ani Choying Drolma chant "Om Mani Padme Hung" live accompanied by bamboo flute, guitar, sarangi (stringed instrument), percussion and keyboard:



Ani Choying Drolma and collaborators transform one of the most recognizable Buddhist chants into a full concert experience while maintaining the collective, devotional aspect of the practice. She effortlessly weaves traditional instruments with synthesizers, soaring solo vocals with audience participation in the chant. In addition to Hindi and Nepali music, Ani Choying Drolma counts Western artists like Bonnie Raitt as an inspiration. She has been dubbed the "rock star nun" and maintains a busy tour schedule half of the year.

Ani Choying Drolma has recorded on Six Degrees Records, Rykodisc, and Hannibal Records and her musical catalogue can be access on various platforms:

[Youtube channel](#)

[Spotify](#)

[Apple Music](#)

Recommended Reading/Resources

[“Buddhist Nun Shares The Sound Of Music,”](#) Megan Drennan Meline

[“Chanting in the Time of COVID-19,”](#) Koshin Paley Ellison

["I have arrived, I am home,"](#) Thich Nhat Hanh

[“Kanho Yakushiji: Zen and the Art of Bridge Building,”](#) Melinda King



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We respectfully acknowledge the University of Arizona is on the land and territories of Indigenous peoples. Today, Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized tribes, with Tucson being home to the O’odham and the Yaqui. Committed to diversity and inclusion, the University strives to build

sustainable relationships with sovereign Native Nations and Indigenous communities through education offerings, partnerships, and community service.

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