

Special Obon Issue May 2019



Photo by Mike Teruya

SOTO ZEN BON FESTIVAL

Friday & Saturday, May 31 & June 1

(See program schedule, next page)

kauaisotozen.org & Facebook

kauaibondance.org

(for summer Bon Dance schedule, song list)

Let's Bon Dance!

The Bon Dance season starts in Hanapepe town! Our Soto Zen Bon Festival is the first on this year's Kauai Buddhist Council rotation schedule. On May 31st and June 1st, don your kimonos, yukatas, hapi coats and join the circle of dancers in the ring. The traditional dancing is the heart of the festival and you will hear the rhythmic beat of the taiko to the happy sounds of the Bon dance songs (ondo).

No matter who you are or where you are from, WELCOME and JOIN US in this joyous celebration! Ancestral spirits return to their earthly home where they are welcomed and feted in this celebratory festival.

The Bon dance carries a universal theme of remembrance and its nature reflects an island style spectacle that showcases the local spirit of Hawaii.

Also, It's a time to gather and return to your hometown communities and be with family and friends. So, kick-off your summer season at our festival in Hanapepe!



Our popular Bon Dance towel can be folded in several different ways!

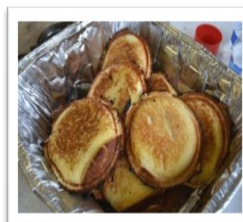
Did you know?

- In the tale of Mokuren, Bon dancing originated with a dance performed by this disciple of the Buddha. "He danced with joy" when his mother was released from suffering in the spirit world. People around him became greatly excited and joined in the dancing as well.
- Although the Japanese first arrived in Hawaii in 1868, the earliest reference to Bon Dance was found in a 1905 newspaper article, mentioning the event and a dance of the *Iwa-kuni* style that was being featured.
- During the Meiji era (1868-1912), when Japan was opening up to the world and adapting to western mores, Bon dances were suppressed and banned in many rural areas and villages of Japan due to its bawdiness. During this period many farmers and country folks emigrated to Hawaii and brought their folk songs and dances with them, along with their many risqué elements. (See accompanying article)
- In the 1930's era of recorded music, *ondo* (folk song, popular dance song), was produced in Japan and introduced to Hawaii. Then on Kauai, *ondo* dances were scheduled in the earlier part of a bon dance, and traditional live music relegated to the latter part of the evening.
- During the 1950's, Soto Zen's Bon dance at Wahiawa camp (the old days) had Japanese *odori* in the first half, followed by Okinawan *eisa* dances in the second half.
- The popularization and secularization of bon dancing in Hawaii has made it a distinctive summer time fare for many island residents.

FOOD - from A to Z

Andagi, chili, chili dog, Chinese pretzels, cotton candy, drinks, flying saucers, Goteborg cups, guri guri, Hawaiian plate, huli huli chicken, ice coffee, manju, mango pickle, mochi, nachos, saimin, shave ice, sushi, plate lunches-pastille,-fish,-deoja,-smokemeat, poke bowl, pork & peas bowl, pronto pup, slush drink, spam musubi, & yakitori.

Getting Hungry? Our food booths will open at 5:00 pm !



Game booths for Children



We are the original home of the flying saucers !
And the home of Taiko Kauai !



Sorry “No BUS RIDE this year”

At Zenshujii, we were committed to serving our active senior community by offering free bus service to our event. However, due to the declining number of riders, we regret that we are unable to continue this service. However, we would encourage all temples and their membership base to car pool with friends and invite seniors along.

*Pink chochins, an iconic symbol of the Soto Zen festival →
Look for the old style chochins above our dance ring*



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The Three Traditional Live Dances

by Gerald Hirata

At most, three live dances are performed at Bon Dances on Kauai.

The *Iwakuni Ondo* is one of the oldest dance featured. A singer steps on the *yagura*, a raised platform in the middle of the dance ring, and a slow drum beat ensues. A story is told in the song and the dancers respond with a *hayashi*, meaningless syllables or phrases interspersed between verses of the song, such as *Dokkoisho* and *Arya sa korya dokko to na*. Another singer follows, and the dance goes on for about 10-12 minutes. Stories of valor or historical interest are sung.

This song/dance is fairly standard at most Bon dances in Hawaii as it has been performed since the early 1900s. Its origins are traced to the Iwakuni district of Yamaguchi prefecture, where many Japanese residents of Hawaii claim ancestral roots. In the early days, before recorded music, when Bon dances took place in the plantation camps or nearby, it was the only song and dance done the entire evening.

Today, probably one of the most popular dance performed at Bon Dances statewide is the *Fukushima Ondo*. Perhaps because of this, it possesses many stylistic variations with tempo, drumbeat, and dance motions. Interestingly, on Kauai, this dance was introduced live, within the last decade, when Taiko Kauai adapted it into its repertoire. At Soto Zen it is the first number that starts the dancing. At Bon dances in other parts of the islands, this dance may be performed more than once during the evening by *ondo* clubs, taiko or church groups.

Historically, the first wave of Japanese immigrants to Hawaii came from the southern areas of Japan, Hiroshima, Yamaguchi, Fukuoka and Kumamoto prefectures. Later arrivals came from tropical Okinawa and the northern prefectures of Fukushima and Niigata.

With the mixing of immigrants from northern and southern Japan, most interesting of all is the *betcho*, a *hayashi* shouted by dancers that is a regional slang expression from northeast Japan referring to the “female genitals.” Other definitions of *betcho* may be a contracted form of *betsu na machi*, a slang expression referring to prostitute houses, or another contraction of the phrase *betsu na cho* (another donation), shouted when collectors at the *choba* (donation) table receives more contributions. Musicians and dancers disagree whether the *betcho* is associated more closely with the *Niigata* or *Fukushima ondo*. In some areas of Hawaii, the distinction between the two is unclear and one or both are referred to as the *betcho* dance. In the Hilo area, the *Fukushima Ondo* uses this *hayashi*.

On Kauai, the term *betcho* is still used to refer to the dance, although its meaning is lost among the younger generation. The dance itself has not been performed regularly in the last 3-4 years nor is the *hayashi* associated with the *Niigata* or

Bon Festival Program

Friday and Saturday evenings

- Memorial service at temple 6:00 p.m.
Rev. Shuji Komagata Public welcome
- Food booths open 5:00 p.m.
- Performance: Taiko Kauai 7:00 p.m.
- Bon Dance 7:20–10:30 p.m.
Fukushima Ondo (first dance, Taiko Kauai)
Iwakuni Ondo (before intermission, KOD)
Betcho (last dance, Kauai Ondo Drummers)
- Special Intermission Performance 8:30 p.m.
“The Iwakuni Ondo” (1954 adaptation)
- On Saturday evening only, a fire burning ceremony will be held at 9:00 p.m.

Welcome! Please visit our Hospitality Booth

Fukushima ondo. The Kauai drum beat has Niigata style elements, yet is quite different from the other islands as the cadence starts slow in the beginning and picks up speed toward the end.

There are no official lyrics to the Kauai *betcho* dance, so simple nursery rhymes in Japanese or English are sung. This dance has always been the last dance of the evening and has been popular with the younger crowd. The upbeat tempo, the optional use of a towel, and forward/backward movements add to the character and enjoyment of the dance.

Three years ago at this festival, the Wahiawa Oahu Ryu-senji Yagura Gumi, performed the “Niigata Ondo,” that was last heard on Oahu in the 1970’s. It was referred to as the *betcho* dance and is currently being revived on Oahu.

At our Soto Zen Festival this year, we recognize and celebrate these three historic dance numbers. However, the *betcho* dance on Kauai must be revived so that it is not lost forever. At Soto Zen, it’s still part of “the last dance tradition.” Other temples must follow suit if this dance is to be preserved.

On this island, the Bon dance song list should always include these three traditional live dances.



**THANK YOU
For Your
Continued Support!**

