

## MUSIC—AWAKENER OF THE SOUL

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"I got rhythm. Who could ask for anything more?" Dr. Arthur Harvey's oak-rich voice undulates down the hall of Leahi Hospital and impels my feet into a dance as I head toward the activity room. I am on my way to help with his Monday morning music therapy, and I know that, as always, the session will bring surprises.

By 9:45 a.m. the 60 patients in wheelchairs and wheelbeds are waiting in semicircles around Dr. Harvey, a professor of music at the University of Hawaii who plays and sings at the piano. On his right, Larry Fukunaga, his music assistant, accompanies him with the electric guitar. Dr. Harvey's ruddy complexion and looming stature signal a strong presence. Fully aware of the effect music has on these invalids, he enlivens the morning with the lilt of Gershwin. The patients begin to unfurl, like flowers awakening with much-needed rain—eyes flutter, heads lift, drooping bodies grow straight, tight lips relax into grins, and clenched fists release their fingers. I help the nurse's aide pass out tambourines, drums, bells, and percussion sticks. "Not too many things get me out of bed like music," Carol Choy, who has been bedridden by a stroke for sixteen years, says, smiling.

Dr. Harvey's weekly session of music is a testimony to the therapeutic and spiritual power of music for the mind and body. According to psychologist Janet Tanaka, "music relieves stress, lowers blood pressure and makes people just feel better."

Dr. Arthur Harvey, one of the handful of people using music therapy in Hawaii, said in his research that, "Music enhances cognitive development. Baroque music seems to make the two hemispheres of the brain work more effectively together." For more than a decade he has performed music for special audiences. "Music therapy is my unique contribution to Hawaii."

Assisting Dr. Harvey every Monday is a blessing; I derive great pleasure from seeing the enjoyment of the patients.

Music nourishes and awakens the soul here at Leahi as in the catharsis of Mimi's tears...the nurturing of Helen's serenade...the rejuvenation of Kyoko Arita's dancing...and the transformation of Yoshi Noburo's singing. It reminds me of the realization that came when I was in a university choral group in England. Though of different ethnic backgrounds, in our singing we surged into a remarkable oneness that embraced and moved beyond our different languages, religions, cultures, and even political views. When we share music, we participate in the deeper rhythms of life and touch that oneness of which we are all a part. Moving together in harmony enables the eternal beauty of our spirit to soar.

When "It's a Small World After All" breaks out, I extend my hands to Yong Kim, a 98-year-old wheelchair-bound Korean woman with the face of a wrinkled cherub. "Would you like to dance with me?" Her athletic grip startles me as she takes my hands and firmly propels me to the rhythm of every beat. When the music ends, she retains my hands in hers—more gently now—and covers them with powder-soft kisses.

The heaviness of the room has dissipated, and Dr. Harvey moves the music to another level, seeking to reach out to individuals or to evoke responses for special occasions. On Amiko Tanaka's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, we all sing "Happy Birthday" in English, while her daughter, Helen, sings in Japanese. Approaching St. Patrick's Day, Dr. Harvey plays the aching nostalgia of "Danny Boy." Unbudgeable Ted Sullivan stares into space, arms folded. But when Dr. Harvey continues with "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling," Ted's icy-blue eyes melt into a moist and tender glimmer; his arms unfold. When Ted begins to sing, we hear an archangel.

From a far corner, a long-time Japanese resident, Yoshi Noburo, distorted with multiple sclerosis, pushes out his red-capped head and quavers out a request: "Ooover Rrainbo." Dr. Harvey responds with the Judy Garland hit. I hold the microphone in front of Yoshi. His face contorts with the effort to gather all his strength and sputters forth each syllable – "Wwhy can't I?" We struggle with him to the end of the song and share the triumph shining from his face flushed and popping with veins. Our jaws relax as we applaud. He sinks back with twinkling, teary eyes—one way that, despite the multiple sclerosis, he can still express deep feeling.

To connect residents to their heritage, Dr. Harvey now plays ethnic songs. He begins with the familiar Japanese folk song, "Haru Ga Kita" (Spring Song). Kyoko Arita, a quiet, elderly Japanese woman with eyes closed and head resting on her chair, awakens from a nap. Her eyes flicker open in laser brightness. She leaps from her chair, singing and dancing to the tune of her childhood favorite. Her face is rosy, her steps light as she prances around like a schoolgirl. Dr. Harvey encourages us with another Japanese song, "Yu Yake Koyake" (Evening Glow). At the back of the room, Helen's arms encircle her centenarian mother, and daughter sings to mother. Rapt in the melody, Amiko Tanaka listens, eyes smiling, mouth upturned, face softly aglow. I join in with Dr. Harvey as he ventures to sing "Narcissus," a well-loved Chinese song, in romanized Chinese.

Regardless of how far we've traveled musically, Dr. Harvey always brings us back to the beauty of our *aina* (land). I try to amuse the patients with a hula to the songs of "Blue Hawaii" and "Pearly Shells," and the audience joins in singing, swaying, tapping. During the wistful "Hawaiian Wedding Song," Mimi, a young stroke patient, bursts into tears. Who knows what memory the music has stirred? When Dr. Harvey starts to sing "Amazing Grace," she stops crying, and her muscles relax.

Finally, the closing song, "You Are My Sunshine," signals the end of the session. While some of the elderly people just sit and smile, most of us sing from our hearts and souls.

Gradually, the patients are wheeled from the room, taking with them the sunshine they have created. Who could ask for anything more?