

Fresno Ondo

This story is best told by the text in the Book *Gathering of Joy – A History of Bon Odori in Mainland America* by Reverend Masao Kodani and the Senshin Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles, CA .

Fresno Ondo is considered to be the first Japanese-American Bon Odori with music, lyrics, and dance created in America. There is a single VHS tape that we think was made in the early 1950's and several teachers have learned the dance from a digital copy of that tape -- including me, Chris Dart, at the Oregon Buddhist Temple. The lyrics talk about the hard physical work to grow the fruits and vegetables, and celebrating their accomplishments.

From Kodani's book:

“After the war, my husband Kikuo, our three children and I settled in Fresno. We were very active with the Fresno Buddhist Temple. Enjoying music, I sometimes played the piano for Sunday service and also tried my hand at writing a few gathas or Buddhist hymns. Rev. Iwanaga and his wife Chizu would often come to visit us from Watsonville, and on one visit I showed him a song I had written on the spur of the moment. He liked it well enough and choreographed a dance, “The Fresno Ondo”. My friend Miyeko Kubota, who teaches Bon Odori, learned the dance and, in turn, taught it to the congregation. At that time I had a friend in Japan who took an interest in the song and had it recorded for us. It was such a long time ago (over 40 years) that I've nearly forgotten the details of how it all happened. Mrs. Kubota still teaches the “Fresno Ondo”, but has changed some of the words. People today no longer wear furisode or the long-sleeved, more formal kimono at Obon, as mentioned in the song, so she had made that change in the song and dance.”

MARY TAIRA, from *A Gathering of Joy* Japanese American Cultural Community Center, Los Angeles

Music & Lyrics Ms. Mary Chiyeko Taira

Choreography Rev. Yoshio Iwanaga

This Fresno Ondo is to our knowledge the first Japanese-American Bon Odori created in the mainland U.S., including music-lyric and dance.

Video of our dance practice in 2016. Note the dance, during the sung portions has beginning, middle, and end sections, but during the musical interlude, only the beginning section is repeated.

OBT Teach - Fresno Ondo - 2016 Teachers Practice

https://youtu.be/WeofCf_qDGk

Lyrics, also from Kodani's book.

1. Budo no miyako, Fresno Ondo

Suika, momo, aka mina gozaru

Tagayase, hatarake, oshimazu kasege,

Honen mansaku mina odore.

Yakkora, Dokkoi, mina mina issbo ni chikara o awasete na-

The capital of grape-growing, Fresno Ondo,
Red watermelons, peaches, we have them all,
Till the fields, work the land, earn as much as you can,
A year of abundance, a bumper crop, everyone dance!
Yakkora, Dokkoi, everyone together — pooling our strength.

2. Orenji musume no kaori no yosayo

Tatta sugata wa yukari fuzei.

Tagayase, hatarake, oshimazu kasege,

Chuka otome no kokoroiki.

Yakkora, Dokkoi, mina mina issbo ni chikara o awasete na-

How sweet the scent of the Orange girls,
Standing tall like the Eucalyptus.
Till the fields, work the land, earn as much as you can,
The spirit of the Central Cal girl.
A year of abundance, a bumper crop, everyone dance!
Yakkora, Dokkoi, everyone together — pooling our strength.

3. Chuka otoko no hitai no ase wa,

Kono chi no takara, chi no hokori.

Tagayase, hatarake oshimazu kasege.

Yakudo otoko ni musume yaru.

Yakkora, Dokkoi, mina mina issbo ni chikara o awasete na-

The sweat on the brow of a Central Cal boy,
The pride and treasure of this land.
Till the fields, work the land, earn as much as you can,
I'll give my daughter to the liveliest of you.
Yakkora, Dokkoi, everyone together — pooling our strength.

4. Kodomo mo otona mo nikkori egao,

Ondo toru ko ni choshi o awase.

Tagayase, hatarake, oshimazu kasege.

Tebyoshi soroete mina odore.

Yakkora, Dokkoi, mina mina issbo ni chikara o awasete na-

Children and adults gather round with smiling faces,
Keeping time to the lead singer.
Till the fields, work the land, earn as much as you can.
Clapping together, everyone dance!
Yakkora, Dokkoi, everyone together — pooling our strength.