

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE A SUZUKI PARENT?

Suzuki Association of the Americas - edited by Maxine Casper

With intensified interest in young children and how they learn and grow, it is natural that the ideas of Shinichi Suzuki often come to the attention of concerned parents. This is to help you, as parents, decide if you are interested in embarking on a musical and educational venture with your child(ren).

THE SUZUKI METHOD IS A PARENTAL PARTICIPATION METHOD

The parents are a vital part of the Suzuki Method. They are the home support team, practice supervisor and coach. Either the mother or father must accept the responsibility of the daily practice as well as the daily listening to recordings. The teacher, who sees the child usually once a week, provides inspiration and guidance to the family learning group. The teacher must be very sensitive to the relationship of each parent and child.

First, we assume that you want to spend time with your child, so that both of you can enjoy and understand your relationship better through music. Your interest goes beyond mere "exposing the child to music lessons." It explores into the areas of mutual learning, home practice, attending lessons and recitals, and enthusiastic, continuing support for the process of learning to play the instrument.

The Suzuki approach relies strongly on a cooperative relationship of teacher, parent and student in a pleasant, disciplined enterprise. It is not merely a piano method, although it does require careful, patient persistent, study and practice on the instrument. It is a combination of philosophy, a technique, and a program of education.

The parent's role involves the following:

- a. Playing the recordings on a regular daily basis.
- b. Attending each lesson with the student, taking notes, and practicing daily with the student at home.
- c. Learning the fundamentals of playing the instrument, and how to take care of it.
- d. Doing preparatory "homework," reading, discussion with others and observing classes.
- e. Helping to create not only a musical environment for the child, but also a total environment of affection, support, encouragement, and understanding.

The parent need not be a trained musician in order to be a good "practice supervisor and coach." With the teacher's guidance, the parent can help with learning posture, fingering, notes, and eventually note reading and theory.

Selecting a good teacher and a good Suzuki program are naturally of paramount importance. Not all teachers who use the name "Suzuki" are equally well prepared. Someone with a good reputation, who has a good command of their instrument, a pleasant, encouraging personality, a

desire to continue to study and a loving way with children may be a good choice. Observing programs and teachers in action can help you decide.

The most important single point for the parent is the willingness to devote regular time to the project, and to work closely with the teacher (and other parents) in building a fine relationship for the sake of the child(ren)'s growth and development.

Questions and Answers

DO ALL STUDENTS LEARN THE SAME REPERTOIRE?

Yes, the basic repertoire is the same for all students. This has elements of great strength and motivation in the sequential step by step learning and the observation of the songs and techniques well in advance of playing. Some teachers give supplementary material which may help to widen the students' musical experience and help provide more style and variety in performances.

DOES THE COMMON REPERTOIRE CREATE A COMPETITIVENESS AMONG STUDENTS?

Competitiveness will only exist if teachers and parents make comparisons among students. Perhaps the word "competitiveness" should be replaced by "cooperation." If the teacher and parents establish a tone of rejoicing in each student's accomplishments, then the children will become very supportive of one another. This cooperation and supportiveness becomes a strong motivation to perform well.

SHOULD REPERTOIRE BE TAUGHT IN SAME ORDER AS PRESENTED IN THE BOOKS?

This is not critical, but basically from the beginning of the book on towards the end. One of Suzuki's major contributions to music education is the unique order of the repertoire. Each piece becomes a building block for the future. Some pieces are challenge pieces often followed by easier ones. The student is constantly aware of the challenge as well as the reward of meeting the challenge.

THE LITERATURE IS PRIMARILY BAROQUE AND CLASSIC. WHY IS THIS?

The music of these periods seems to have the greatest appeal and logic to children. It is harmonically simple and the structure is generally easy for a child to grasp. Because small children often find it difficult or impossible to use the piano pedals comfortably, this music is also appropriate since it requires little or no use of the pedals.

WHY IS THERE SO MUCH EMPHASIS ON LISTENING TO RECORDINGS OF THE REPERTOIRE, AS WELL AS MUSIC IN GENERAL?

Listening is not only the nucleus of Suzuki teaching, but perhaps the most essential element. It has been proven that the more the student listens to the music, the more quickly he learns the repertoire and the more willing he is to practice. The whole Suzuki philosophy is based on the concept that a child can learn his "mother tongue" from constant listening and repetition. The

disciplines of listening and repetition seem to give the young child a sense of security and will help introduce him to the elements of self-expression and self-identity.

IS SUZUKI TEACHING DONE IN GROUP LESSONS?

Suzuki students visit their teacher once or twice a week for a private lesson, accompanied by a parent. Teachers encourage sibling and/or other students to quietly observe. So, there is usually at least one other student and parent in the room while the "individual lesson" proceeds. Violin and other instruments regularly schedule group lessons each week.

Suzuki teachers usually work with two (or more) pianos. Students play in ensemble with the teacher from the beginning. Since the piano can be a somewhat solitary instrument, observation of others, rhythm games, theory and when skills permit, playing together with other students is very important so that the child may experience the motivation and skills of group learning as well as the private lesson.

WHEN IS THE STUDENT FIRST INTRODUCED TO READING MUSIC?

Some teachers expose children to the symbols of music from the very beginning. Children take great delight in learning to recognize and draw clefs, notes, rests, and other musical symbols. Even the youngest children can learn to read rhythm quickly and well. The consensus is to start formal reading no later than Suzuki Book 2. This gives the child time to develop his/her aural and digital skills which will make it natural and easier to read easy supplementary pieces. Reading should be very carefully integrated into the child's curriculum and at the best time for that individual child.

IS THERE ANY DIFFERENCE IN THE QUALITY OF READING WITH THE SUZUKI STUDENT, AS COMPARED TO THE TRADITIONAL STUDENT?

It is the Suzuki teacher who is responsible for presenting music reading logically, sequentially, and in the easiest way possible. The Suzuki student will develop reading skills easier and more quickly because playing skills are in place. It is a very natural progression to learn to read next. Also, because the ear is so well trained and in use in playing, the Suzuki student will have the ability of transferring music to memory with ease and in an amazingly short time.

WHAT ARE THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD SUZUKI PIANO TEACHER?

- Possessing the skills of a good musician
- Knowing what should be done, why it should be done and how to do it.
- Enjoying the company of people, especially children.
- Using imagination, fantasy, and whimsy while maintaining a good sense of humor.
- Being aware of the student's message, and then following his/her lead by guiding each child from that point.
- Being flexible, for every youngster is different.
- Being willing to experiment, always trying new ideas and techniques.
- Being honestly positive and enthusiastic while rejoicing in each child's accomplishments.

MUST PIANO TEACHERS BE CERTIFIED TO TEACH USING THE SUZUKI METHOD?

It has been the personal responsibility of each teacher to search out quality training not only in Suzuki philosophy and teaching basics, but music as well. The Suzuki Association of the

Americas (SAA) has records available upon request of what training has been registered for individual teacher members. To request this and other information, and/or to become a member, please contact:

Suzuki Association of the Americas

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