

# What is interesting about Suzuki?

by Jenny Macmillan



Dr Shinichi Suzuki (1898-1998) was a violinist, an educator, a philosopher, and a humanitarian. He saw an opportunity to enrich the lives of children through music. His approach to teaching combines oriental philosophy with a repertoire of European folk songs and classical pieces, as well as a sprinkling of common sense.

Suzuki himself taught the violin, and was actively doing so at his Institute at Matsumoto in Japan until his mid-nineties. The approach is still associated with the violin, although it is now used successfully by teachers of piano, viola, cello, double bass, guitar, flute, recorder, singing, organ and harp. He called his method the Mother Tongue approach. Noting how rapidly children learn to speak their own language – through constant exposure, imitation, repetition and parental praise – he realised the same approach could be used for learning music. He reasoned that every child has the ability to make music if given the appropriate training and learning environment. Making music need not be the preserve of a few precocious individuals.

His best known account of how he devised and refined the approach, and some of the results achieved by his pupils, is to be found in his book *Nurtured by Love*, first published in 1969. In it he explains his belief that musical talent is not inherited or inborn, but has to be learned and developed. The book also reveals something of his oriental philosophy, which is concerned with educating the whole person through developing their musical ability: *A person with a fine and pure heart will find happiness*.

To us in the West, the most memorable image associated with Suzuki may be that of several hundred children massed on a stage playing

the folk song, *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*. This tune, and variations on it, is the first that all pupils learn. Such images cause us mixed emotions. We

may be filled with admiration for the extraordinary co-ordination between pupils of varying ages and abilities. But at the same time we are suspicious of the regimentation involved and wonder whether it encourages the flight of the individual spirit that music has the power to release.

**Noting how rapidly children learn to speak their own language, Suzuki realised the same approach could be used for learning music**

## Ten key principles of the Suzuki approach

Despite its apparent contradictions, the Suzuki approach has evolved into an effective system of teaching which, while it has much in common with conventional teaching, also has a number of key differences. These include the young age at which pupils start, the observation of other pupils' lessons, parental involvement, extensive listening to music, learning from demonstration, step-by-step mastery of each technique, use of a common repertoire, playing from memory, reviewing old pieces, and group work to complement individual lessons.

### Ten key principles of the Suzuki approach

Young start	Step-by-step mastery
Observation	Common repertoire
Parental involvement	Memory
Listening	Review
Demonstration	Group work

Suzuki showed that it was not only desirable, but also quite practical, to teach pupils from an early age – three or four. Before receiving tuition, children attend other pupils' lessons for several months and see for themselves how they are conducted. Children learn from their peers. They love to emulate what they see other children do. This observing – which in practice means colouring or drawing quietly in the room rather than being expected to watch intently – continues until their teens. Teachers plan lessons so pupils observe children who are a little older and a little more advanced and hear the pieces that lie just ahead of them. The pupil being taught, meanwhile, becomes used to concentrating on playing despite distractions, and loses – or rather never develops – that sense of embarrassment or self-consciousness playing in front of others.

Suzuki showed how beneficial it is to involve one of the parents, typically the mother. Parents need not be musicians. Carefully, parents are taught how to help their children at

home. Parents attend lessons and make detailed notes about what needs to be practised, and how, so each step is thoroughly mastered. They are taught to give plenty of encouragement while supervising daily practices. In this way, pupils are well prepared for each lesson, so lessons are spent refining and polishing the performance rather than correcting notes and rhythms. Parents are also expected to help their children listen to music in general and to the pieces being learned in particular. So from the earliest possible age, children are exposed to the sounds of music – the language of music. With these sounds in their heads, it becomes easier for them to play musically at their instrument.

A good relaxed posture for all instruments is emphasised. Young piano pupils, for example, use a footstool to improve their balance, rather than just dangling their legs from the piano stool. Pupils begin and end each lesson by bowing to their teacher, as a mark of respect. This also helps ensure pupils are giving their full attention when they start their lesson. Individual instrumental lessons are supported by group classes for pupils of similar ages and abilities, which are used to teach general musicianship, including early reading skills. As with learning a language, very young pupils learn by listening and from demonstration, not by playing from printed music. When they can play fluently, producing a beautiful sound with a good technique, they learn to read music, in the same way that children learn first to speak and then to read their own language.

For any one instrument, all pupils learn a common repertoire, carefully selected by Suzuki and his colleagues to develop particular techniques, which takes them to grade 8 and beyond. Starting with the theme and variations based on *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*, they progress through various folk songs, minuets and sonatinas, to major works by the great classical composers including, for the piano, Bach's *Italian Concerto* and sonatas by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. Most teachers also introduce supplementary pieces, according to the needs of each student. Long before reaching the end of the repertoire, pupils are no longer learning by demonstration but from the music. However, they continue to play pieces from memory. This enables them to concentrate on the performance of the music, rather than on playing a sequence of printed notes. Children have little difficulty doing this and it means they are able to play music anywhere and at any time. Pupils retain many of their old pieces and build up their own repertoire, continually returning to them to refine them as they themselves mature musically.

For parents observing children who are more advanced than their own, it is inspiring to see how playing quality progresses and how quickly pupils move through the repertoire. Because progress is so easily visible, because preparing pieces for group lessons and termly concerts motivates them to practise, and because the repertoire provides its own milestones, Suzuki pupils are generally not entered for the traditional graded examinations, although many teachers will do so if it seems appropriate. Indeed, most pupils wish to take grade 8 when they complete the repertoire. Along the way, pupils graduate at various levels through the Suzuki repertoire, performing solo and ensemble

items at graduation concerts. Other performing opportunities range from informal "lucky dip" performances in group lessons; casual gatherings of two or three Suzuki families at which each child plays one or two prepared pieces followed by a tea party; termly concerts arranged by the teacher, perhaps in liaison with another teacher of the same or another instrument; through to national Suzuki concerts at venues such as Symphony Hall, Birmingham, and the Royal Festival Hall. Children are encouraged to support each other, fostering an attitude of generosity and co-operation.

## The wider view

Suzuki started developing his ideas when teaching young children to play the violin immediately after the second world war. In the late fifties, his ideas were introduced to the USA. By the early seventies, Suzuki teaching had spread to Australia, New Zealand and Asia and, in Europe, to Belgium, Denmark, England and Ireland. Interestingly enough, the British Suzuki Institute was established in the same year that EPTA was founded: 1978. Suzuki teacher training courses in England were held at Benslow in Hitchin, initially for violin, with the first piano course in 1982. Currently 20 European countries have established Suzuki associations, with significant numbers of teachers in Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, Poland, Italy and Germany. Numbers are growing in Finland, Spain, Holland and Belgium. Now, thousands of parents and teachers in over 40 countries worldwide nurture loving human beings through the Suzuki approach

to education.

Suzuki's aim was to develop the whole child. He felt a need to help every child find the joy that comes through music-making. He didn't wish to turn all his students into professional musicians, but to unlock each child's potential and to develop their sensitivity as human beings by developing their musical ability.

Suzuki's approach to instrumental teaching has a circle of adherents who are deeply committed both to his teaching methods and to his underlying philosophy of education. As knowledge and understanding of the approach and its advantages become more widespread, as more teachers train and apply the principles, and as musicians who learned this way begin teaching and performing, there is little doubt that it will move beyond this limited circle and have an even larger impact than it has had to date. Many of Suzuki's principles deserve to become mainstream. Meanwhile, any parent fortunate enough to have a child learning by this approach is almost certain to be rewarded by seeing the child make extraordinary progress, gain in confidence and self-esteem and, in the words of Suzuki himself, become a person with a fine and pure heart who finds happiness.

Further information about the British Suzuki Institute is given on [www.britishsuzuki.com](http://www.britishsuzuki.com) ■

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## The British Suzuki Institute was established in the same year that EPTA was founded: 1978

# Controversial aspects of the Suzuki approach

Sharon Mark interviews Anne Turner about introducing Suzuki piano to Britain and considers some controversial aspects of Suzuki philosophy in the light of recent articles in *Piano Professional*



Sharon Mark



Dr Suzuki and Anne Turner in 1990

## 1 How did you get involved with the Suzuki approach?

My husband worked for the Bank of England and, as his wife, I was occasionally allowed to accompany him on his travels to the Far East. Whilst he was working with the Bank of Japan, I was taken to see a Suzuki concert in Tokyo. At this stage I was a conventional piano

teacher and I'd never seen anything like it in my life – confident, competent and happy children aged four to six demonstrating a mastery of skills. When I returned to London, I hunted in the hope of finding Suzuki piano teaching in Britain – but there was nothing. However, a pupil of mine was in touch with Felicity Lipman, a very fine Suzuki violin teacher in London. I went to observe Felicity teach and was so impressed that I applied for, and was granted, a Churchill Fellowship. This enabled me to go to Japan for three months to observe this approach to music education. I came back to London and, standing on a pavement in Golders Green, Felicity and I decided to establish a British Suzuki Institute.

## 2 Suzuki said that *ability can be developed by training*. However, it's not unusual to hear a (conventional) teacher or parent blame a child's shortcomings on their lack of musical ability or their character.

Dr Suzuki believed that talent has to be developed; what a child becomes depends on how that child is educated. He observed how children assimilate the intricacies of their own language and his theory was that many other skills and knowledge could be learned if presented in the same way – through observation, imitation and repetition. We'll take anyone – there's no audition, except to talk to the parent and explain that it's going to be hard work!

## Nature versus nurture

Carol Woods, contributing in the September 2006 issue of *Piano Professional* to the contentious nature versus nurture debate, revealed that opposing views exist in research literature as to whether musical ability is innate or learned. In essence, however, her article encourages readers of *PP* to consider the potential of all pupils, not merely the very small number [of pupils] ... genetically set up with an unusually generous number of neural connections [for whom] musical thinking will happen naturally (Harris, 2001 cited in Woods) since there is evidence to suggest that a musically rich environment may help to shape and promote musical ability (Woods). Is it possible that we dub some pupils "unmusical" simply because we make learning an instrument difficult (Chappell) in the first place?

Thompson and Lehmann (cited in Williamson, 2005) have observed how differences between individuals' sight reading and improvising abilities are often ascribed to variations in innate disposition. The authors proceed to describe this apathetic view as regrettable since research findings, spanning 25 years, clearly indicate that both sight reading and improvising are amenable to enhancement through structured training. Indeed Stephen Baron, writing about the Colourkeys approach, refers to how children often feel at ease with the concepts of improvisation.

Harris (2001, cited in Woods) leads us to consider our responsibility as teachers: nature must be supported by nurture ... effective teaching can help to cause the pupil to make the necessary mental connections and relationships to help bring about the development of true musical thinking.

SM

## 3 Are there parents who are not suited to the Suzuki approach?

Where parents are sceptical, I get them to observe lessons

► for several weeks. Then they begin to see what's in it. They see that hard work produces excellent results. And they see that it is not necessary for parents to be musical. Non-Suzuki teachers are often horrified at the idea of parents sitting in on lessons. Generally criticism about the Suzuki approach comes from non-Suzuki teachers who don't come and watch.

### Parental involvement

**Carol Woods** refers to the important role that parents play in shaping their children's musical behaviour. However, the question of exactly *how* to get (often busy) parents involved is an issue which causes uncertainty in the profession. The issue (seemingly) becomes stickier still when we decide to *introduce a different focus* (**Anderson**) such as encouraging exploration at the keyboard which is *usually dismissed as "messing around"* (**Anderson**) despite the heuristic value of this kind of learning.

**Elza Lusher** considered the demands of today's *result-centred society ... [and having to] adapt to the demands of parents*. However the problem is that, if we hold our pupils accountable only for results and achievements, it is very difficult to teach the whole child. **Sally Chappell's** musings included the following question: *Do we formalise all our pupils' musical experiences too much?* As piano teachers in the UK, how can we convince parents (and pupils) that it's real learning – discovery, exploration and curiosity – that matters most?

Indeed, research findings peppered throughout the September issue of *PP* suggest that real learning stands a chance if we challenge conventional learning practices, such as *the way in which notation tends to dominate the entire learning process* (**Anderson**). Being able to provide reasons which support our chosen teaching approach and bringing parents in on the process is central. As much as our role is to facilitate musical learning for children, we also need to consider our responsibility in educating parents. **SM**

### 4 The concept of mentoring is now considered an essential element of CPD. If *PP* readers are interested in observing a Suzuki piano teacher, how can they go about it?

Details of Suzuki teachers are on the BSI website [www.britishtsuzuki.com](http://www.britishtsuzuki.com) and Suzuki teachers should be happy to have other teachers observe their lessons.

### 5 How do Suzuki piano teachers structure learning?

Initially, for several months at least, pupils listen to music – recordings of the music they will learn in the early stages, and plenty of other good music. They will observe other young children's lessons for several months. Once the language and sound of music is in their ears, they commence their own lessons. From the first lesson they are taught to listen for a good sound; they are taught posture and technique – how to produce that sound – which is then combined with the music so that they're putting those good sounds into context. Once technique is well developed, reading skills are practised regularly and considerable emphasis is placed on ensemble playing by overlapping pupils' lessons and in group lessons. Individual lessons are supported by group lessons, continued

observation of other pupils' lessons, and listening at home to a wide variety of music.

### 6 Group teaching is a key area for scepticism amongst conventional teachers. Why is this a vital aspect of Suzuki teaching?

It's important to realise that group teaching is not instead of individual lessons, but an added dimension with potential for learning that the one-to-one experience does not offer. There is such a considerable role to be played by social factors on children's developing musicality. Apart from the fact that children love meeting other children and much enjoy making music together, group lessons provide wonderful opportunities for cross learning and developing conceptual understanding through group musical activities.

### Group aspect

**Sally Chappell** suggests that *greater consideration should be given to the importance and influence of communal music-making*. Her collated findings on music education systems in South Africa, Hungary and Cuba report that music-making opportunities in group context is *an important factor in musical development ... aids enjoyment, motivation and can give young beginners an understanding of what makes learning an instrument so great*. Meanwhile **Stephen Baron** observes that, in shared lesson situations, children can access *considerable gains in musicianship* without any loss of progress. **SM**

### 7 Many children appear to drop instrumental learning as they make the transition from primary to secondary education. Is this an issue with Suzuki pupils?

The fact that deep and lasting friendships are made in the teacher's own group and at parties after pupils' concerts and workshops is significant. Because the family is involved, music-making becomes a way of life for the children. So Suzuki pupils don't find music lessons lonely. When they become competent musicians, having developed their skills through their own hard work, they get much pleasure from their music-making. Indeed, we all enjoy doing what we are good at. For these reasons, few tend to drop out.

### 8 Does competition become a problem with the 'community' nature of Suzuki teaching?

When people asked Dr Suzuki what he was, what he stood for, he replied: *first I'm a humanitarian, second I'm an educator, and third I'm a musician*. We're not just teaching our pupils how to play an instrument but rather a diverse range of life-skills. Hard work leads children to acquire the discipline to improve progressively, and this feeds through to other subjects. Developing interaction between the pupils is seen as integral to the process of learning – instead of competitiveness we emphasise co-operation.

### 9 Suzuki children learn to play before learning to read music. Are they hindered by delaying learning to read?

All children learn to speak their language before reading and writing; they observe, they imitate, and they repeat. By focusing on the sound before introducing the symbol, through demonstration, imitation and repetition, children can develop

aural perception and memory. By the time children start reading, they have a firm grasp of keyboard geography which means that notation is associated with *where* the note is – not merely the letter name. This, along with the fact that pupils can hear an aural representation of the notation before they play, has enormous significance where sight reading skills are concerned. The process is musical rather than mechanical.

### Sound before symbol

**Sue Anderson**, revisiting the concept of 'sound before symbol', suggests that instrumental teachers' approach to the learning process tends to be dominated by notation *right from the first lesson* despite a *growing body of evidence [which indicates] ... that students thrive musically in all ways when playing by ear precedes learning with notation.*

Somehow I think that **Anderson** hits the nail on the head when she refers to instrumental teachers' *great anxiety and fear* when faced with the challenge of how to go about teaching beginner instrumentalists without the aid of a tutor book. It's true to say that we tend to teach as we ourselves have been taught.

Personally speaking, when I tried to defend my argument for introducing beginner pianists to notation from the first lesson, after being introduced to the concept of 'sound before symbol', my reasoning crumbled and I started to

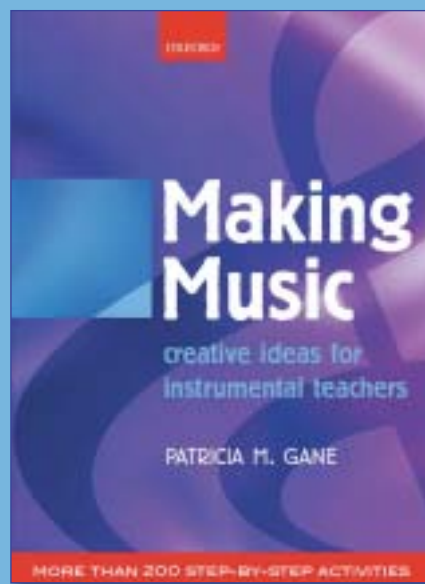
recognise the *scope for messages to get scrambled (Anderson)*. Exploring the concept of how to teach the sound before the symbol has been scary, yet incredibly exciting and ultimately rewarding, *influenc[ing] students' enjoyment, motivation and musicianship (Chappell)*.

SM

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# Suzuki in *schools*



Kate O'Connor

*by Kate O'Connor*



Until very recently, the Suzuki approach to learning an instrument has been available only in private teaching practices, but rarely in

schools. Having been developed in Japan in the mid-twentieth century, originally on violin, the method is based on every child having one individual lesson and one group lesson every week, with the parent present at all times. This intensive learning process is obviously expensive, and very different from what many schools can afford to offer their pupils. As music teaching in schools has moved closer towards whole class learning, many parents are looking elsewhere for a more individual approach for their child's musical education. The move towards whole class instrumental teaching, which is undoubtedly very successful for some children, but fails to engage or truly educate many others, is what made me think about starting an initiative to set up Suzuki practices within primary schools.

Many parents I had spoken to were already being charged for instrumental lessons, and yet did not have any say in the variable standards of teaching that were being offered. Other

## **We currently have ten Suzuki programmes in primary schools in London**

parents were getting group lessons offered to their children for free, but felt that they would rather pay for an approach they knew to be

more effective and stimulating for their child. And again and again, I heard from schools that peripatetic teachers were not staying in their jobs for very long, or were apt to disappear on tour for long periods, or were generally just not very interested in the teaching they were doing. Of course this is not the case for every peripatetic music teacher – far from it – but it is sadly the case in many of the schools with which I have had contact.

### **SuSI**

So in December 2004, I decided to set up the Suzuki in Schools Initiative, affectionately known as SuSI. Working from the premise that only two small compromises on the Suzuki approach were needed to make Suzuki a viable method for working within schools, I set about contacting schools to offer them a Suzuki programme on violin, viola, cello or piano. Our necessary compromises were that we

## The benefits of working within a school environment can be enormous

must offer Suzuki to all children in the school, even if their parents could not attend the lessons, and that in order to make it less expensive, the children learning string instruments should be able to learn in pairs. I had consulted many experienced string teachers, and most of them felt it was perfectly possible, particularly in the early years of tuition, to teach a pair of children together as effectively as teaching them singly. In fact, some even felt that this could be such a benefit in terms of motivation that they were already teaching pairs within their private practices. As we were offering Suzuki only to primary schools, the children would not become too advanced to learn in this way while in our care.

A much more tricky subject was that of parental involvement, and it remains our biggest challenge. I truly believe that to deny children whose parents are in full time work the opportunity to learn in a Suzuki way is untenable within a school environment. Equal access must be at the forefront of our minds, and so the compromise that has been put in place is that children over the age of six can learn without a parent's presence in the lessons, and children under six must either have a parent there, or wait until they turn six. So our Suzuki teachers working within the Suzuki in Schools Initiative teach individuals and pairs, some with parents present, some without, starting children at any age from three to eleven. Apart from these differences, the Suzuki programmes in our schools are identical to those private practices that you find anywhere in the country. We currently have ten Suzuki programmes up and running in primary schools in London, and more schools are expressing their interest every week.

The benefits of working within a school environment can be enormous. As a teacher, I very much appreciate working within a team, and having a clear management structure, with a headteacher or music co-ordinator that I can turn to if I have a problem. It's great to work within a community of educators, where inspiration often comes over cups of tea in the staffroom at break time. Being on the staff of a school gains you access to fundraising for events, and often means you can teach kids on free school meals without charging them, as the schools are funded to support these families. Percussion instruments and keyboards are usually available for your group lessons, and you can access video and recording equipment free of charge. It also means you can teach Suzuki without needing to have your studio at home! A few of our schools are now offering Suzuki programmes on both violin and cello, which means those privileged teachers get to work not only with class teachers, but also with Suzuki colleagues. This is the way we hope more of our schools will go.



For the children, the benefits are also numerous. They are already in a space they associate with learning and education, and as a result are generally more focused and ready for their lesson than a child who has just got out of a car or off a bus. They have their lessons during the school day, so are not exhausted by having to do a whole school day and then have their instrumental lesson after school. When a Suzuki programme is set up within a school, the motivation factor is very high right from the beginning – the kids see their friends doing their lessons, practising their pieces, performing their

solos, and so on, and this automatically inspires them to do the same. Children starting in a Suzuki programme that is already established have the additional motivation of seeing the more advanced children and thinking "I want to play like that!"

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► Children who learn together at school may already know each other, but because any group starting together will have a wider age range than that of one class, they also get to make friends with children they do not already know. It is very touching to see young children become friends with older children, as has happened in all my groups. Most schools have some sort of orchestra, so in addition to their individual and group lessons, students can access orchestral experiences without having to travel or pay extra. And of course, within a school there are so many opportunities to perform! Assemblies, talent shows, school concerts, parents' evenings, summer fetes and winter fairs all provide us with an opportunity to get the kids used to performance – whether busking at the school fete, or performing *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* in assembly.

## It is touching to see young children become friends with older children

### Now and the future

SuSI is still very young! Our longest-running school programme, which I set up independently of the initiative, but which became the flagship for our official school programmes, has been running for only four years. The most advanced children there, at Lauriston School in Hackney, passed their grade 3 exams last summer, and are rapidly approaching Suzuki book four. Already the school is fantastically impressed with their achievements, and some of the children there still have three years left at primary school.

I can't wait to see the headteacher's face when they perform in assembly in three years' time – Vivaldi concerti, here we come!

And where do we hope to go from here? The British Suzuki Institute's mission statement says that it aims to make Suzuki 'the method of choice in Great Britain'. SuSI covers only London at the moment, and I am working towards making Suzuki the method of choice for London primary schools. Eventually, there is no reason why SuSI should not go national, and even international. I would like to think that in twenty years' time, any child in the UK could access Suzuki lessons should they wish to. I learned by the Suzuki approach as a child, and I really believe it is an amazing thing to offer as part of a child's education. I hope to make this extraordinary experience available to every child.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you are interested in being involved with SuSI, whether as a teacher or a parent, or on behalf of a school you are involved with.

My contact details are [kate@suzukiinschools.co.uk](mailto:kate@suzukiinschools.co.uk), mobile 07946 474 320. ■

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# Music reading in the Suzuki style

by Caroline Fraser

*Music must not be approached from its intellectual, rational side, nor should it be conveyed to the children as a system of algebraic symbols, or as the secret writing of language with which they have no connection. The way should be paved for direct intuition.* Zoltán Kodály, 1964



## What is music reading?

Music reading is recognising a written symbol, recalling a sound and reproducing it. We must see a rhythm, hear and feel it; see a melody, hear it; see a tonality, “feel” it kinesthetically; and see a harmony, hear and “feel” it. Knowing the theory is important, but that knowledge in itself is not going to produce an excellent music reader. There has to be a direct link between the symbols on the page and the ear, and between the ear and the instrument; the student must see, hear in the inner ear, understand, and then play.

In order for the student to see the written symbol and connect it with a sound, the student must first have the sound in the ear. Therefore the first step in music reading must be to hear the music and let all the musical elements of rhythm, melody, harmony and form be absorbed in an unconscious manner, so that these same elements may later be identified in a conscious way. Teaching music reading through the ear is the basis of the philosophies of Kodály, Orff, Dalcroze, Suzuki and Gordon.

## The importance of music reading

It is essential that all our students become excellent music readers. The ability to read music fluently will be a key factor in their enjoyment of music-making as amateurs or professionals. As pianists, music reading takes on a special dimension. How often are pianists asked at the last minute, “Can you accompany this”? Many soloists or chamber music players have only one line of music, while pianists have to sight read a much more complicated score. In addition, pianists are called upon to recreate a full orchestra when accompanying a concerto soloist. The secret of success in both these scenarios lies in the performer having internalised the appropriate musical style: by that I mean that the essence of the style has become a part of the performer’s very being.

## Suzuki students’ preparation for music reading

Suzuki students start their studies with a period of intense hearing and absorbing the repertoire they will play. As parents play the repertoire recordings, children’s hearing is unconscious, in the same way as children unconsciously absorb their language before talking. Once the music has been internalised, Suzuki students start to find the repertoire on their instrument, at first imitating their teacher and later letting their ears guide their fingers to find the notes. In this way children develop the important direct connection of ear to instrument. They hear and find the melody, rhythm and harmony. With the ear-finger connection in place, the next

- ▶ step is to show the child the written symbol for the sounds already in the ear, and thus the symbol-ear-finger connection is complete.

Once simple musical elements have been absorbed and performed repeatedly by the student, we can gradually introduce the student to these same concepts in the written score. We can skilfully separate the elements and present them in a carefully thought out sequence, thereby creating a smooth transition into music reading by using first the familiar Suzuki repertoire. Detailed examples of how to implement this are found in my articles on music reading on my website: [www.carolinefraser.no](http://www.carolinefraser.no).

## The student must see, hear in the inner ear, understand, and then play

Robert Schumann said that a good musician can see the score and hear the music; hear the music and see (imagine) the score and guess in a new piece and know in a familiar piece what is coming. Children who have been trained to read by ear, by having being "bathed" in the musical style can achieve this level of musicianship.

### A natural approach

This is a natural approach to music reading in which children learn to read music in the same way they have learned to read their language. In language, children hear and then speak. They are exposed to written symbols and later they

will learn to read, being introduced first to familiar vocabulary.

Children who hear their language, and then read, have a tremendous advantage over those who try to read a language they have never heard. In English we know how to pronounce "tough, though, through, bough, cough" because that is the way it sounds, although the spelling patterns are the same. "I am on the bus" but not "on the car"; "I'm at home" but not "at shop" because that is how we hear it in our inner ear.

The Suzuki approach should produce excellent music readers. This is learning-based teaching: teaching music reading as naturally as children learn to read their language.

*Teach music in such a way that it is not a torture  
but a joy for the pupil.*

*Instill a thirst for finer music in him, a thirst  
that will last a lifetime.*

**Zoltán Kodály**

## Children learn to read music in the same way they have learned to read their language

■ Caroline Fraser was born in Scotland and now lives in Peru. She started teaching using the Suzuki approach in 1974 in California, pioneering Suzuki in Peru in 1981 and Chile in 1988. She was a lecturer in music theory at Holy Names University and directed the Suzuki Teacher Training Institute there. She is President of the Suzuki Association of Peru.

Since studying Kodály methodology for a masters degree, Caroline has been researching how to integrate the Kodály and Suzuki approaches in relation to music reading. She frequently offers teacher workshops on music reading. Email: [blondetfraser@terra.com.pe](mailto:blondetfraser@terra.com.pe)

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Caroline Fraser and Alessandra

# Getting together at *workshops* by Lavinia Ferguson



Lavinia Ferguson

If you walk into a Suzuki workshop at any time you are instantly surrounded by the sounds of children singing, practising, playing in groups and performing in concerts. For young pianists coming to a workshop for the first time it is exciting to hear older children playing so well. There may be violins, violas, cellos, orchestras and choirs. Just for those few days they experience what it must be like to go to a specialist music school with all the stimulation of so many musicians living and working together. During the course they will have daily piano lessons in a small

masterclass, together with a variety of other classes such as musicianship, singing, movement, and ensemble. There will be concerts every day, often for faculty as well as students, and everyone will have an opportunity to perform.

At a workshop, all the teaching is in groups. But unlike 'group method' teaching, where all the basic skills of the instrument are taught, Suzuki group classes are an extension of the work done in individual lessons. We know how well children learn when they are having fun, and how much they can learn from each other. The social interaction is particularly valuable for piano pupils who may not normally meet and play with other musicians like them. The purpose is for children to enjoy playing and learning together, to get used to performing in an informal setting, and to be inspired and motivated to work hard and to raise their standards.

Typical musicianship classes at a Suzuki workshop will include work on theory and reading as well as a good deal of ensemble playing. The common repertoire is an excellent teaching resource. Whatever stage the pupils have reached, the teacher can dip into earlier pieces to demonstrate. So theory is taught from a starting point of what the children already know from their own listening and playing.

A workshop can be as short as half a day or as long as a week. Some are small and intimate, others have several hundred students. If children are lucky enough to attend a residential course they may have opportunities for handbell ringing, sport, art and drama alongside their musical

activities. Some courses provide time off to enable families to go to the beach. There are new friends to be made and all the fun of boarding school without the exams.

Of course, since it is a Suzuki workshop, the younger children will be accompanied by their parents. It is fundamental to the Suzuki approach that parents are very much involved in the musical development of their children.

They are expected to take a close interest so they can be helpful and encouraging.

But parents sometimes need inspiration too. No-one can say that practising with

children is always easy and it can be useful to have input from other parents and teachers.

Invariably children and parents come away from a workshop refreshed and full of new enthusiasm. The children have obviously progressed after their intensive work, and their parents are more relaxed having had a chance to share stories and problems with others over a glass of wine in the bar. For teachers, it has been a welcome opportunity to meet colleagues and share ideas; for new teachers in training, the workshop has provided a wide range of lessons for observation. It has been a time for social and musical interaction for everyone, and a time for widening horizons.

At the top of the scale are the huge international workshops, such as in Turin last Easter, where teachers, parents and children from all over the world gather to play together and to celebrate their achievements. How wonderful

it is to be able to participate in such a gathering where, with no special preparation, children can learn and make music together from Day One simply because of the way

they have been taught. What better demonstration of Dr Suzuki's vision of a world in which people, brought up to love music, live together in peace and harmony!

Most Suzuki workshops are open to observers. Anyone interested should visit the BSI website at [www.britishsuzuki.com](http://www.britishsuzuki.com).

■ Lavinia Ferguson studied music at Bristol University and has been teaching Suzuki piano in Bristol since 1984.

## Children learn well when they are having fun

## A time for social and musical interaction

# Ideas for *Group* lessons

by Jenny Macmillan

Group lessons are crucial to Suzuki philosophy. They support and develop the work covered in weekly individual lessons. Groups offer opportunities for developing musicianship through ensemble playing and informal performances. Children's enthusiasm and enjoyment usually shine out in group situations, leading to increased motivation to practise at home. Children and parents appreciate the social aspect of group lessons – in my teaching studio group lessons are called Piano Club.

With orchestral instruments, it is possible to play in large groups – in unison or in parts. Much fun can be had and useful performing, ensemble and musicianship skills can be developed through games for co-ordination, listening, reading and performance. The use of piano in groups is not quite so obvious. Most Suzuki piano teachers have two pianos, so they can put two (or even three) children at each instrument playing in unison, one hand each, or duets and trios (doubled up – six hands at each piano!). I have an extra keyboard I can bring into my music room for groups, providing yet further opportunities for ensemble work. However, we also play many games away from the piano.

Suzuki groups can vary in size from four or five children up to twenty or more. And group lessons may be held weekly, or monthly, or however it suits the teacher and pupils. There is much overlap in the function of musical activities I use in group lessons. However, for clarity, I shall divide games into four sections: to develop co-ordination, ear training, visual reading skills and performance/ensemble skills. For this article I have selected games which can be used equally well by non-Suzuki teachers.

## Co-ordination games

These are especially useful and necessary with very young children to help them learn basics such as right and left, finger numbers, hand shape, independence of finger movement, and feeling the music with their bodies. With teenage pupils we may warm up with exercises of the swinging arms and rolling shoulders variety. I have also tried teaching pupils to juggle – to develop their co-ordination, but also to develop their peripheral vision which is important when sight-reading.

Co-ordination games include:

- Simon Says, eg "Simon says put your right hand on your nose" or "Put your left hand on your tummy" (don't do it!).
- All put hands behind back. "Bring out left hand with finger 3 waving."



Dynamics game

- All sing *Twinkle* (or another folk song) with actions: as you sing the first line "*Twinkle, twinkle, little star*", touch feet, feet, head, head, arms in air, head; continue with shoulders, waist, knees, feet, etc.

## Ear training games

The first of these games is from Caroline Fraser who has many wonderful ideas for teaching.

- All sing a familiar, simple song. Then sing it again, clapping hands together for the short notes (crotchets) and tapping hands on shoulders for the long notes (minims). Then do the actions again, this time hearing the song in head, but not singing out loud. Next time, half the group clap the crotchets and the other half tap the minims, again everyone singing silently in their heads.
- Teacher (or child) do actions as in previous game – others have to guess which song is being performed (another of Caroline's fascinating games which the children love!).
- Dynamics game – all crouch down and whisper "*pianissimo*", slightly sit up and say "*piano*", rise more and say "*mezzo piano*" a little louder, start to stand up and say "*mezzo forte*", stand fully and shout "*forte*", stretch arms high in air and yell "*fortissimo*". Then vice versa – from *fortissimo* down to *pianissimo*.
- Tempo game – all walk very slowly round room saying "*adagio*" four times, speed up walk a little saying "*andante*" four times, ditto "*moderato*", "*allegro*" and finally run around saying "*presto*".

- Twinkle dance – each child is assigned the rhythm of a Twinkle variation. Teacher plays variation rhythm on a drum (or other instrument). When pupils hear the rhythm of their variation they must quickly stand up and dance to their variation and quickly sit down when the rhythm changes to a different variation.

With older pupils we discuss and identify intervals, chords, cadences, time signatures, key signatures, circle of 5ths, forms, periods, and so on. We also share ideas about practising.

Specific activities with slightly older children (eg age 8+):

- Canons – all look at score of a short (eg 4 bar) canon. All sight sing it together. Sing it again, each child working out suitable fingering by miming it on knee meanwhile. Sing in canon. Take turns to play melody from memory at instrument. All play melody in unison. Play in canon.
- Continuous scales – children line up at two pianos. One child plays C major scale two octaves with metronome set to, for instance, 100. Child at other piano plays G major. Another child at first piano plays D major, and so on round circle of 5ths.

## Visual reading skills

I have many sets of flash cards, some purchased from music shops (eg Chester, Kodaly, Hal Leonard), others I make up myself as the need arises (eg Italian terms used in Suzuki book 1). We have games for identifying note values, and others for pitches.

- One Minute Club – to become a member of my One Minute Club (which is rewarded with the child's name on a poster in my music room and a certificate to take home – to say nothing of the cheers and jubilation from the other members of my Piano Club and their parents), children must name in random order from flash cards all the notes on the treble and bass staves (from low G in the bass clef to high G in the treble clef) in 60 seconds (holding the stopwatch to time it is a popular job!). Each child's short term goal is to beat their own previous best time.
- Telephone game – each child is given two rhythm cards each with, for example, a four beat rhythm such as crotchet, crotchet, two quavers, crotchet. These cards are laid on the floor in front of each child. Teacher claps a rhythm (telephones the child) and the child replies by clapping the rhythm back and turning the card over.
- Another game is to lay out four of the above rhythm cards and all together clap the four bar rhythm. Teacher then turns one card face down, and all clap the four bars again, this time one bar from memory. Then teacher turns another card over, and all clap it again. Ditto until the whole four bar rhythm is clapped from memory.
- Follow the score – each child has a copy of the same piece of music. One child plays piece at piano, others have to follow score (parents and teacher help). Or teacher plays at piano and stops every so often, and children have to point to place in score when music stops.
- Score questions – each child has a copy of the same piece of music. Teacher plays piece and then asks children

questions such as:

*Can you find a B?*

*What is the name of the first note in the right hand in bar 2?*

*Where can you see this rhythm (teacher claps it)?*

*What does "rit" mean?*

- Joint reading – two children sight read a piece, one hand each; or four children at two pianos – two play right hand and two left hand; or double up for a duet – two children at each piano; or a trio – three children at each piano.
- ## Performance/ensemble skills
- Six children sit at two keyboards and play a simple piece, eg *Twinkle*, in unison.
  - One child at each of two keyboards – one plays left hand of a familiar piece, other plays right hand.
  - As above, but children swap hands every four bars, or every two bars, or every one bar.
  - Football game – children line up behind each other at two pianos. One plays bar 1 of a piece, child at other piano plays bar 2, new child at first piano plays bar 3, etc.
  - Two children, a piano each – one plays all *forte* sections of a familiar piece, other plays all *piano* sections (and when not playing each gets up and walks round stool!).
  - Children prepare duets and trios (doubled up at two pianos), or accompany a child on another instrument.

Group lessons are also an ideal opportunity for children to practise performing in an informal atmosphere.

- Lucky dip – each child has box of pieces of paper with names of all the pieces in their repertoire. Each child picks a piece of paper and performs that piece. Other children may be given specific areas to check meanwhile, eg posture of performer, hand position, sound quality, balance between hands, dynamics, etc. Everyone must first say something positive about the performance, and can then make a suggestion for improvement.
- Mini-concert – everyone practises performing their piece for a forthcoming concert.

**Even if children find the practising tough, they usually love their group lessons**

## Conclusion

Carefully led group sessions can develop pupils' confidence, giving them opportunities to get to know each other and to work together. Even if children find the practising tough, they usually love their group lessons. Their enthusiasm is infectious – parents and children alike are greatly motivated by working and socialising together. It helps parents to see what other pupils of a similar age and standard are doing, and it inspires children to feel they are members of an active and exciting group.

One of my 11 year old pupils, who has also had experience of non-Suzuki music lessons, recently said to her mother:

*I WISH other kids could come to just ONE Suzuki lesson or workshop or something. Then they'd SEE how great it is that we all know each other's stuff and can do things together! It's SO much better!*

More ideas for group lessons are given on my website: [www.jennymacmillan.co.uk](http://www.jennymacmillan.co.uk) and particularly in the chapter on group lessons in my *Notebook*: [www.jennymacmillan/Notebook.pdf](http://www.jennymacmillan/Notebook.pdf). ■

# Working with children with

## Girl with Down's syndrome

by Caroline Gowers

In the course of teaching, over a period of nearly 30 years, I have had the privilege of close contact with two children who had very severe learning disabilities. In both cases music became, probably, the most important thing in their lives.

The first child was Nick Shaw. He was born completely blind. His parents heard that I was a Suzuki teacher living in their neighbourhood and asked me to teach their older child, then aged four. Nick was at every lesson, in his carry cot. The book 1 piano recording became for him what a favourite teddy might be for another child. He heard it incessantly, and by the age of 11 months he was playing every tune in book 1 with his right thumb. What was amazing was that he played fluently and musically. This was the beginning of his musical development. [For continuation of Nick's musical development, see next article: Ed]

Nicola Beattie, the second child, was born with Down's Syndrome. She started learning the piano with Stephen Power, a Suzuki teacher then living near Peterborough, when she was nine. By that time she had had three months of observation and had listened to her book 1 recording morning and evening. She had also heard classical music of all sorts since birth and her mother noted that when she was a baby music always stopped her crying.

With Stephen she spent a whole year mastering the *Twinkle variations* and another year learning all the tunes in book 1 with her right hand. Stephen's early emphasis on balance (very difficult for her) and good tone has stood her in good stead ever since.

By the time I met her, at a Suzuki workshop, she could play all of book 1 hands together and she took enormous delight in this achievement. To me she seemed to be a shining example of Suzuki teaching and Dr Suzuki's philosophy that every child can succeed given the right environment. She spent much more time than most children listening to her recordings, she proceeded at her own pace with constant help and encouragement from her mother, and improved her playing by repeating all the pieces she knew over and over again. She loved, and still loves, performing.

I have been teaching her for about 12 years and it has been a most rewarding experience. Music is for her a means of communicating in a way that spoken language is not. She



Nicola Beattie and Caroline Gowers

### Every child can succeed given the right environment

has a remarkable feeling for nuance and phrasing – the things that are so difficult to teach but seem to be absorbed by osmosis. We have struggled with technique and with rhythm but she has slowly and surely progressed and recently performed the slow movement of Mozart's Sonata K545 in a public concert, bringing tears to the eyes of many in the audience.

None of this could have been achieved without her mother, who insisted on regular and disciplined practice, repeating what was done in the lesson and following my instructions. She and Nicola took delight in each step mastered, constantly reviewed earlier pieces and steadily moved on at Nicola's pace.

Her ability to play the piano, her enjoyment of performing and her pleasure in the friendships she has formed within the "Suzuki family" have been a central part of her life and that of her parents. ■

■ Caroline Gowers studied piano and organ at the Royal College of Music. In 1979 she embarked on the BSI training course and followed this with three months in Japan at the Talent Education Institute. For some years she directed the piano teacher training course in London. She continues to be involved in teacher training and to teach privately at home.



Carey Beth Hockett

## Autistic and blind boy

by Carey Beth Hockett

One of the most stimulating and enriching experiences of my teaching career has been working with a blind and autistic musical savant called Nick Shaw. Nick was able to play contrapuntal passages on the piano as soon as he could reach the keyboard. I met him when he was about four and taught him the cello from the age of five to 18.

When I was first asked to teach Nick, I explained that I had no special training for working with blind or autistic children.

However, I have always believed that every child is an individual with 'special needs'

and that our success as teachers depends on our ability to recognise and respond to those needs. We adhered to the main principles of the Suzuki approach with Nick:

- he 'observed' the lessons of another child for several months before he started learning himself;
- he learned by listening (of course!);
- his parents were actively involved, not only as facilitators of the home practice sessions, but also in helping me find ways to explain things to him;
- Nick had regular individual and group lessons and attended many courses.

My individual lessons with Nick usually had two main sections. In the WORK section I chose specific teaching points designed to help Nick to think and act in an organised, pre-defined and consistent way. These points included cellistic issues such as bowings, fingerings, articulation, dynamics and posture. In our early years, many points would be reinforced by a verbal instruction or a touching reminder. In later years, we came to rely very heavily on the minidisc recorder. Nick was not able to operate the machine by himself, but if we recorded

the right kinds of instructions, he could have a little more independence by either listening to or playing along with one or more tracks.

In the PLAY section of the lesson we did just that – played old pieces, played new pieces, improvised on one cello or two cellos or with one of us playing cello and the other playing piano. Once, when Nick was about 14 we came to

the PLAY section of his lesson and I asked him to go to the piano to accompany me. He found his way there with pleasure while I proposed that

we play Fauré's *Elégie*. The first of the great C minor church bell chords chimed out before he had even sat down on the bench. Somehow we arrived at the end of the piece and I asked Nick whether he had heard it many times. He said he had heard it once.

The most exciting aspect of working with Nick is the unabashed enthusiasm he shows when hearing and making music. We invited him to present a short solo concert at our summer school last year and when he finished he stood

up and told the audience that it was the BEST concert he had ever given and that he planned to give one next year too! Thank you, Nick, for reminding us that it is a great privilege to be a musician. ■



Nick Shaw

■ After graduating from the Eastman School of Music, Carey Beth Hockett was principal cellist of the Cayuga Chamber Orchestra in Ithaca, New York for 12 years. For the past 18 years she has lived in London where she teaches for the London Suzuki Group and in the Junior Department of the Royal Academy of Music. She has given numerous workshops for teachers and children across Europe and America.

# Notes from a Suzuki family -

*by Amanda Wauchope (mother)*

Apart from the notion that a “well-rounded education” should include some music, we had no grand plan for our children. Yet, at ages ten and 12, both children are serious about their music, play two instruments each, have a wonderful repertoire of pieces – all played from memory – and play with friends in quartets and trios!

What’s more, although my husband and I both achieved only the first few grades on the piano, and cannot play any other instrument, we help our kids daily with their practice, and this is key to their learning. We help with sight reading, scales, technical exercises, new pieces, repertoire – not just on the piano, but on the violin and cello too, yet we’ve never played a stringed instrument!

It is because of the Suzuki approach that these things are happening. We have been involved with Suzuki for over five years now, and consider it to be among the most important decisions we have made – yet we tried hard to *avoid* it when it was recommended to us!

When we first moved from Australia to England in 2000, we looked for a piano teacher for our five-year-old daughter Alyssa, who had enjoyed some group keyboard classes in Melbourne. Consistently we were told to wait until she was seven, that only a “Suzuki teacher” would take on such a young child. We were disappointed because Alyssa had learned a lot during her keyboard lessons, and we wanted to maintain the momentum. The “Suzuki” suggestion sounded like some kind of sect, so we continued to search for a mainstream teacher. However, after months of dead-ends, we decided to take a closer look.

After observing some other students’ lessons, we saw immediately that here was a wonderful opportunity. The environment was family-friendly, full of people (parents, siblings, other families), yet calm, with a structured approach to learning. The lesson was not limited to the teacher and child – the parent took notes, the teacher made sure that both child and parent understood each lesson point, and occasionally she would involve other observers. Teacher expectation seemed to be high, but within reach. All pieces, even elementary ones, were developed to a high musical level, and were expected to be held at about that level for months afterwards. Weak areas were gently revised until (and after!) the child mastered them. Support seemed to be total. We learned that parents were expected to work at home daily with the children, and to communicate with the teacher if there were difficulties. Parents were expected to provide a “rich, musical environment” – to play recordings, attend concerts, and encourage performance wherever possible, and the teacher would advise and recommend. Children were happy, confident and produced pleasing sounds. Parents were superlatively positive.

We took the plunge, and started our lessons.

Immediately we had to make some changes – we upgraded our piano, we introduced routine practice times (otherwise kids and even parents! would balk); we woke up earlier so that practice was finished almost before anyone noticed; we learned ways to motivate the children to work on tiny details. And little by little, the children progressed. A new piece one week would soon become a “repertoire piece”; these would mature and develop a level of excellence, until one day all the pieces in the first book were musically mature enough to be played as a recital, from memory. This was astonishing, but was also the Suzuki norm!

Over time we attended recitals of all seven books. Every one of these concerts was like a gift: the musical quality was high, the events celebrated everyone’s efforts and families were rightly proud of their achievements. Early books gave comfort, later books were inspirational. The sense of the continuum was pervasive – although later books seemed impossible, we could see that we were inching our way along the path, as were other families, and so, perhaps, we too might one day reach these higher books. Several of the children have since completed all the Suzuki repertoire, and some have carried on to tertiary musical studies – we love to hear of their exploits.

The decision to study second instruments came about a year after the children started piano. Alyssa asked to learn violin at school, and she was followed a year or so later by Linden commencing cello. By now we knew of children who studied two (even three!) instruments. Despite our total ignorance of stringed instruments, we felt confident that we could help the children by applying the same general concepts from piano. Each week we would review the teacher’s notes, and each day we would work on the details. Both children progressed quite rapidly.

Eventually we decided to switch to Suzuki violin and cello teachers, because of the clear direction, the familiar process, the constant sense of achievement, and the community support.

And now our Suzuki approach is so familiar to us that we apply it to other areas. Linden is studying Chinese – he practises daily, and maintains his “repertoire” of characters. The children know that, to achieve excellence in anything, they need incremental steps, revision, support, and a long-term view. And also, they have found that poor performance has been almost directly related to less effort or less support.

This knowledge alone makes the Suzuki process invaluable, but as I write I can hear Alyssa playing the first movement of a Haydn piano sonata. It is gorgeous. On Sunday, with Alyssa playing violin and Linden playing cello, they will rehearse in a trio for a mini-concert to celebrate my family’s visit from Australia. How lucky we are to be a “Suzuki family”! ■

## **We tried hard to avoid Suzuki when it was recommended to us**

# (mother and daughter)

by Alyssa Ralph (daughter)



Amanda Wauchope and Alyssa Ralph

Hi! I'm Alyssa, I'm 12 years old, and I learn both the piano and violin by the Suzuki approach. I began Suzuki piano shortly after my family moved from Australia when I was six. My brother started a few months later, and even my parents had some lessons!

One day, after I had been learning piano for about a year, I asked if I could learn the violin – my school was offering

lessons. My parents agreed. I progressed fast because of all the things I'd learned with piano, and by year four, I was at the same level as the year sixes. I had 15 minute lessons each week, and I practised 15 to 30 minutes a day with my Mum helping me as much as she could.

I did grades 1 to 3, but by year five I started to get bored because I only ever worked on my three exam pieces. My motivation and exam results slowly dropped. My Mum and I decided that I could stop violin at the end of the year, but gradually I realised that I didn't want to stop – I was quite good at it, and playing was fun. That was when my Mum suggested that we could switch to Suzuki violin.

I felt sorry for the kids at school. Most quit by the end of year six. They didn't seem to know how to practise, and their Mums didn't know how to help them. A ten minute practice on the morning of their lesson was not enough! Also, the teacher wanted us to be positive and enthusiastic but she rarely gave out praise. I think fewer children would have quit if they had been proud of their achievements.

For about two years now I've been doing two Suzuki instruments. Although I practise for a total of an hour and a half each day, I love everything about it – playing from memory, having loads of repertoire, having good one hour lessons, and playing in masses of concerts. I love attending workshops, having lots of Suzuki friends, playing together for fun, being able to read new music, and feeling that it's one

big family group. But most of all, I love the fact that, in Suzuki, practising becomes "what you do", like eating or sleeping; you just "have" to do it. I do find, though,

that sometimes my whole week is taken up by homework, music and dancing (I do a lot of dancing).

I want to do grade 8 (and maybe more!) in both instruments. I've no idea where all this music will lead, but I start the drums next term – I can't wait! ■

**I love the feeling that it's  
one big family group**

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# Notes from a Suzuki *parent*

by Debbie Collison

Isabel is seven years old and is in her fourth term of Suzuki piano lessons. I have two teenagers who play various instruments, but this is our first experience of Suzuki lessons. On meeting our teacher it immediately became clear that I was being asked for a different kind of involvement in Isabel's learning. One aspect of this was that I would need to have piano lessons to experience the Suzuki approach first hand.

I eagerly anticipated my first piano lesson. Our teacher is very good at putting her pupils at ease, yet I still found myself becoming tense as I sat down at the piano. When playing for the teacher (or for a parent) one feels exposed. I realised that the way to keep the satisfaction coming is to define success in small, achievable goals. For example could I keep a relaxed hand for one phrase of *Twinkle*?

There were frustrations.

Does the following scenario ring any bells? After working diligently on a piece with your child all week they achieve their practice goals at home, only to fall apart in the lesson. This became a familiar pattern, only now I was the child! When the same thing happens to Isabel, I can sympathise with her disappointment.

When Isabel learns a new piece, she already has the notes in her head from listening to recordings. This means that the first time she plays a piece at a lesson, she knows it well enough to allow her teacher to focus on finer points of technique and expression. While Isabel is learning to play a piece hands separately, she can play the left hand while I play the right hand or vice versa. When she puts both hands together she already has a good idea of how they fit.

The same approach works well with duets. Isabel enjoys it when I mess about with the tempo and put in wrong notes (sometimes deliberately), emulating the worst that might



Debbie Collison and Isabel

## I have a genuine admiration for what Isabel achieves on the piano

happen when two children play together. She has become very good at staying with me, however much I maul my part. This game is even

funnier the other way round, and Isabel often succeeds in losing me completely.

I have a genuine admiration for what Isabel achieves on the piano because I know how difficult it can be. I understand what Isabel is aiming for with each piece, and this means we can celebrate her micro-achievements together. This all sounds very positive – but of course there are times when one or other of us ends up getting cross or sulking.

While writing this I asked Isabel if she wanted to say anything about our practices. She kindly said she wouldn't mention that I'm not quite as good a pianist as she is! Her printable comment was: *Playing with Mum is fun. It would take a lot longer if I had to work everything out by myself.* ■



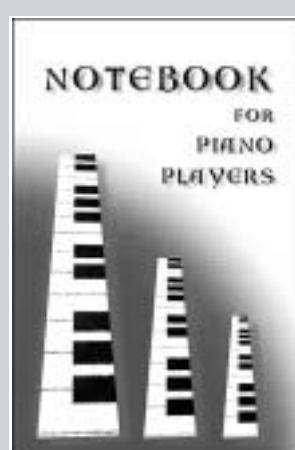
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# Suzuki piano teacher training *in Britain*

by Grant Mead

The Suzuki approach is fundamentally different from most styles of music teaching. It is an instrumental method that places great emphasis on aural development, with an early start, listening, memorisation, performance and review of previously learnt material as the foundation on which to develop children's musical and technical ability. Suzuki teachers undertake specialised training in how to facilitate very young children's music learning in a positive, natural and nurturing way and become highly skilled at developing musical concepts through self discovery, review and repetition.

Historically, many piano teachers taught the way they were taught. While this can work for some children, for many young beginners their teacher's inexperience of a child's "natural learning" often results in failure to succeed. The systematic approach to technical and musical development in Suzuki education ensures that, at every stage, children can master the pieces that they have been assigned, without failure.

Teacher training courses help teachers discover and develop their potential to make every child successful and provide the foundations required to work effectively with three and four year old children through to advanced levels. Working with pre-school children requires a good understanding of child development and an awareness of motivational games and activities which encourage and promote appropriate learning behaviour. Careful attention to technique and posture from the beginning is also crucial for setting foundations for future success. The study of child development, psychology and approaches to education help trainees gain a broad knowledge of what to expect when working with children of all ages and levels.

On the training courses, trainees learn how to introduce and reinforce teaching points effectively while building strategies and methods to overcome and correct technical,



Suzuki piano teacher trainers and trainees

## Many piano teachers teach the way they were taught

## Opportunities to teach at workshops and summer schools worldwide

physical and musical problems. The British course includes topics such as Suzuki philosophy and methodology, pedagogy, performance and memorisation, technique and tone production, aural and theory training, child development and psychology, observation of teaching, supervised practice teaching, group teaching and approaches to music reading and parent education.

There is a collegiate atmosphere on the British teacher training course, with a non-competitive and supportive environment where teachers work together, sharing their ideas and experience. Suzuki teachers rarely work in isolation and frequently combine for student concerts, group lessons and workshops. Following training, graduate teachers have established large and successful studios and as the teacher's diploma is an international qualification, there are many opportunities to teach at workshops and summer schools throughout Britain, Europe and worldwide. The demand for trained Suzuki teachers is so high that the association is unable to supply teachers for the thousands of enquiries received each year. ■

■ Grant Mead has been a Suzuki teacher for 26 years and is Director of Piano for the British Suzuki Institute.

The British Suzuki Institute is responsible for conducting Suzuki teacher training as part of the European Suzuki Association system. The part-time, long-term courses have five levels of training each requiring attendance at an average of 18 days during the year. Trainees usually take a year to complete each level and start teaching children within the first year of training. The BSI teacher training is the only internationally recognised training course for Suzuki teachers in Great Britain.

# Training as a Suzuki *teacher*



Gill Gordon

by Gill Gordon

In 2003, having been out of piano teaching for 17 years, I decided to return to teaching and, on the recommendation of a friend from college days, contacted the British Suzuki Institute to undertake what I thought of at the time as a "refresher course". Nearly four years later, I'm still studying!

My only previous awareness of Suzuki's approach was a documentary in the seventies, showing hundreds of young violinists in a football stadium, playing the *Twinkle variations* through to a concerto. It was very moving, but I dismissed it as irrelevant to me as a pianist.

From the BSI website I discovered that I had to prepare a Mozart sonata movement plus a piece of my own choice for audition. There was also some recommended reading and an instruction to have memorised the first repertoire book before the first course, which I dutifully did. It seemed quite a lot of preparation for a "refresher". Thus commenced a personal journey which has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

That first course was totally puzzling – emphasising a very different technique from that learnt years ago. There was a strong focus on variations on *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*, and on listening to the tone. It seemed very intense, and it was!

It is the most comprehensive piano teacher training programme I have come across, encompassing an in-depth study of piano technique, how to teach it to very young students, incorporating Suzuki's personal philosophy into one's approach to teaching, understanding child development in those crucial years, educating parents and learning how to include them in the child's learning process. We observe the teaching of experienced Suzuki teachers and teach children under the supervision of a teacher trainer. We also practise teaching one another and teaching our teachers.

Suzuki believed that every child can learn to play, not just those with a special talent, and that, with the right approach, every child would develop the required ability to reach a high level of achievement. My experience to date has proved him correct every time.

An interesting discovery has been that what Suzuki developed was not a "method", but a set of principles of learning, which can be applied to anything. I am also a horn player and there is, as yet, no Suzuki brass. So I have embarked, with the help of some willing children and parents,

on the process of developing an approach for brass "in the style of" Suzuki.

Furthermore, I have noticed, particularly in the last two years, that everything I do as a teacher is now rooted in Suzuki's philosophy. My experience of teaching in this way has given me a new joy in working with children and realised for me the concept of teaching being a Work of Heart. ♥

■ Gill Gordon studied at the Guildhall School 1969-1973 with Bridget Wild (Arrau's teaching representative in the UK).

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