

LONGAY CONSERVATORY OF GUITAR

4701 PATRICK HENRY DRIVE, BLDG. 9, SANTA CLARA, CALIFORNIA 95054

<http://www.longay.com>, (408)343-0933

# THE SUZUKI PHILOSOPHY

by FRANK LONGAY

*The following is taken from the LGC Parents' Guide and summarizes what Dr. Suzuki calls the "Mother Tongue Approach."*

Much of Dr. Suzuki's success hinges on what he calls the "Mother Tongue" approach to music education. He realized early in his career that young children are able to learn the art of playing beautiful music much the way they are able to master their own language. He was not satisfied with the idea that certain children are born talented but discovered instead that any child, given the proper training and environmental conditions, may develop a high level of ability. Thus, talent is not what we are born with, but something which may be learned.

Talent education for the child begins at an early age. It is contingent on listening to the music, practicing with a parent, and performing at every opportunity. The recorded repertoire is played for the child repeatedly throughout the day even before the lessons have formally begun. This method of absorption greatly enhances the educational process. Reading notes with the instrument is postponed until the basic playing technique is mastered.

Parental involvement is an essential part of Dr. Suzuki's approach. The parent is considered the "Home Teacher" and is taught the basics of the instrument before the child begins his lessons. The parent carefully observes the child's lessons so that he or she may better assist at home. A positive and supportive atmosphere during the home lesson is strongly encouraged. At home and during the lesson, constant attention is paid to correct posture and proper arm, hand and finger placement. Tonalization, the production of beautiful tone, is continuously stressed.

There are numerous opportunities available to the young performer. Small home concerts can provide the incentive to put the finishing touches on a piece of music. In addition to the weekly private lessons, weekly or bimonthly group lessons are held. In these classes student play their pieces together or perform for each other in a mutually supportive atmosphere. The group lessons can foster motivation as the student observes his peers perform more advanced repertoire. The classes provide a social setting for students to share their common musical experiences. Children are also invited to observe the lessons of other students. This can provide fresh perspectives in the understanding of the instrument and the music.

The music is standardized and carefully sequenced. Each piece prepares the student for the next. Rather than present the child with a series of dry exercises or manufactured etudes, literature is offered which is not only of high quality but enjoyable to play. Since each piece demands specific technical skills, it should be thoroughly mastered before moving to the next.

Review of past repertoire is vital to his or her progress.

In addition to developing musical sensitivity, frequently listening to the reference recordings greatly aid in motivating the child. His capacity to enjoy practicing correctly at home depends on the ability of the parent and teacher to motivate him. The child is not forced to practice, but is drawn to it by interest which has been carefully fostered.

In terms of a child's development, the value of a discipline such as music can never be underestimated. It is not Dr. Suzuki's ultimate goal to create professional musicians, but to enrich a child's life through music.

# International Suzuki Association

## The Suzuki Method™

The Suzuki Method is based on the principle that all children possess ability and that this ability can be developed and enhanced through a nurturing environment. All children learn to speak their own language with relative ease and if the same natural learning process is applied in teaching other skills, these can be acquired as successfully. Suzuki referred to the process as the *Mother Tongue Method* and to the whole system of pedagogy as *Talent Education*.

[Shinichi Suzuki](#) (1898-1998) was born in Japan and studied western music in Germany in the 1920s. He first began teaching young children in Japan in the 1930s and further developed his ideas and philosophy of teaching during the post-war period. His approach to teaching has now spread to many parts of the world and is proving increasingly successful everywhere. Because he was a violinist, he first applied his ideas to the teaching of violin, but it has since been used with many other instruments, in nursery school teaching and other more general areas.

The important elements of the Suzuki approach to instrumental teaching include the following:

- an early start (aged 3-4 is normal in most countries)
- the importance of listening to music
- learning to play before learning to read
- the involvement of the parent
- a nurturing and positive learning environment
- a high standard of teaching by trained teachers
- the importance of producing a good sound in a balanced and natural way
- core repertoire, used by Suzuki students across the world
- social interaction with other children: Suzuki students from all over the world can communicate through the language of music

### **Aims of the Suzuki Method**

The Suzuki method has enabled many children to play music to a high standard. Substantial numbers of Suzuki trained students have indeed become highly acclaimed professional musicians. However, the training of professionals is not the main aim: the emphasis throughout is on the development of the whole child, on education through music. Dr Suzuki himself always said that his wish was to foster the human qualities in the child. At every opportunity he called on politicians, teachers and parents to ensure that the full potential of every child is developed:

*I want - if I can - to get education changed from mere instruction to education in the real sense of the word - education that inculcates, brings out, develops the human potential, based on the growing life of the child. That is why I am devoting my efforts to furthering Talent Education: what a child becomes depends entirely on how he is educated. My prayer is that all children on this globe may become fine human beings, happy people of superior ability, and I am devoting all my energies to making this come about, for I am convinced that all children are born with this potential.*

### Piano Instruction that Focuses on Listening

The most common preschool piano instruction approach with a focus on listening is the one developed by Shin'ichi Suzuki (1898–1998). In the Suzuki approach, students copy what they hear and see in the same way they learn their native language. When learning a language, young children hear their parents speaking, begin to mimic words, and then learn to express ideas in sentences. Much later, they learn a system of visual symbols for the language and learn to read and write it.

Using a similar approach, the Suzuki Talent Education System teaches strings, harp, flute and piano to preschool students, starting at about age 3. Just as a child learns language by being surrounded by those who speak it, a child learns music by being surrounded by it. This is why the Suzuki system is also known as the “mother-tongue approach.”

All Suzuki students learn the same pieces, listening to recordings of the pieces they play to get the sound of them in their ears. During lessons, pieces are presented in incremental units through demonstration. The pieces are reinforced at home by the parent, through repetition and listening to the recordings. As students do not read the music initially, they are able to concentrate on technique and tone production. Mastering these skills through repetition develops a strong ear, a solid memory and an effortless technique that is built into the nervous system at an early age. After these skills have been sufficiently trained, students are taught to read the score. Since the initial teaching approach is by rote, students may not become independent learners easily and may struggle with developing reading skills.

Suzuki piano students learn pieces from a series of six repertoire books that include arrangements of folk songs and original piano repertoire. The pieces are sequenced to provide an exact order of concepts and skills. There are no instructions for the teacher or student about how to play the pieces, nor is there a teacher's manual. Teachers can learn to teach this approach by attending workshops and teacher-training courses. The Suzuki Association of the Americas maintains a list of registered teacher-trainers.

### Piano Instruction that Focuses on Reading

In a preschool piano instruction program with an emphasis on reading, students are taught to read the same pitch and rhythm symbols as average-age beginners, though at a slower pace. These methods combine traditional piano instruction with age-appropriate musical experiences for preschoolers. Lessons using these methods are usually designed for private instruction, but can be used with groups. For some methods, the teacher's manuals suggest singing, body movement, improvisation, ear development and listening activities. Student lesson books, ear training books, recital books and workbooks may be available for each level.

Preschool piano methods have about twice as much reinforcement and half as much material in each book as average-age beginning methods. Illustrations and printing are larger and targeted to the younger student, and there are fewer words and directions on the page. Workbooks have more examples for each concept, and concepts are often reinforced by coloring and tracing.

Pitch reading is usually begins with pre-staff notation, rather than notes on the staff. When the staff is introduced, usually one clef (and one hand) is presented at a time. Notes are often