

About This Book

Over the years, the *American Suzuki Journal* has published hundreds of articles supporting Suzuki parents in their work. Teachers, parents and Dr. Suzuki himself have addressed such topics as:

- basic Suzuki philosophy
- motivation, listening, practice, group lessons
- general child development, importance of arts education
- care and maintenance of instruments
- stories of famous musicians
- reviews of books, music, and videos
- Suzuki study from the perspective of parents, students, and graduates
- evaluations of the Suzuki Method, comparisons with other educational methods, and descriptions of the long-term results of Suzuki study

This booklet contains a selection of *ASJ* articles on some of the topics most helpful to parents whose children are in the early stages of Suzuki study. They outline some important elements of the Suzuki Method and provide suggestions to help parents work effectively with their children.

History of the SAA and Parent Education

When the Suzuki Association of the Americas was founded in 1972, the *American Suzuki Journal* was published as a newsletter to disseminate information about the method and current Suzuki activities. Most *ASJ* readers were teachers who were starting Suzuki programs, looking for guidance in applying the Suzuki principles and trying to connect with other teachers to share their struggles and successes.

During the Association's early years, the *ASJ* served as the primary source of information about Suzuki-related activities. Some suggestions for parents were included, but the *ASJ*'s main focus was to educate teachers and provide a forum for sharing information about the method. From 1982 through 1987, *Suzuki World* magazine was published by Ability Development Associates to provide more information to parents whose children studied the Suzuki method. Many SAA members, both teachers and parents, wrote articles for *Suzuki World* during these years. As the Suzuki method spread and the parent membership of the SAA grew, the *ASJ* also expanded and enlarged its focus. Now, there are numerous articles of interest to parents in every issue.

All parents are cordially invited to join the SAA as Associate Members to receive current issues of the *ASJ*.



Suzuki and the Talent Education Method

Shinichi Suzuki's Legacy

Shinichi Suzuki was a violinist, educator, philosopher, and humanitarian. Over the past fifty years his work has had a profound influence on music education in his own country and throughout the world.

Suzuki based his approach on the belief that, "Musical ability is not an inborn talent but an ability which can be developed. Any child who is properly trained can develop musical ability, just as all children develop the ability to speak their mother tongue. The potential of every child is unlimited." Suzuki's beliefs and the method he developed have now reached thousands of teachers, children and families in many nations.

Origin of the Talent Education Method

Born in 1898, Shinichi Suzuki studied violin in Japan for some years before going to Germany in the 1920's. After further study there, he returned to Japan to play and teach. He taught university students, but became more and more interested in the education of young children.

Suzuki realized the implications of the obvious fact that children of all nationalities easily learn their native language. He began to develop a method for teaching violin modeled after the way in which children learn language and called it the Mother-Tongue Approach or Talent Education.

Development of the Method

Suzuki's work was interrupted by World War II, and after its end he was determined to bring the beauty of music to the bleak lives of his nation's children. He began teaching at a small school in Matsumoto, working to develop a sequential

repertoire that would present musical and technical points in a logical manner. Within a few years Suzuki's students were amazing listeners with their abilities.

The Talent Education movement grew as other teachers studied with Suzuki and began to teach throughout Japan. The program expanded as teachers of different instruments became interested in Suzuki's approach, and materials were developed for cello, piano and flute. Over the years, thousands of Japanese children have received Suzuki training at the Talent Education Institute in Matsumoto and the branch schools in other cities.

Introduction to the U.S.

In 1958 a Japanese student at Oberlin College brought a film of Suzuki's young students performing in a national concert. American string teachers became intrigued with the results of Suzuki's method and began to visit Japan to learn more about his work.

Interest intensified in 1964 when Suzuki brought a group of students to tour the U.S. and perform at a joint meeting of the American String Teachers Association and the Music Educators National Conference. The method began to flourish in the U.S. with visits of American teachers to Japan, performances of Japanese tour groups, and the growth of hundreds of Suzuki programs across the country.

The Suzuki Method Today

Dr. Suzuki did not develop his method in order to produce professional musicians but to help children fulfill their capabilities as human beings. As he said, "Teaching music is not my main purpose. I want to make good citizens, noble human beings. If a child hears fine music from the day of his birth, and learns to play it himself, he develops sensitivity, discipline and endurance. He gets a beautiful heart."

In the years since he began his work, Dr. Suzuki inspired thousands of parents and teachers in more than forty countries in Asia, Europe, Australia, Africa and the Americas to nurture loving human beings through the mother-tongue approach to music education. In the supportive environment fostered by the Suzuki method, children learn to enjoy music and develop confidence, self-discipline, concentration, and the determination to try difficult things—qualities that are sorely needed in our time. As Pablo Casals remarked through his tears after hearing Suzuki children play, "Perhaps it is music that will save the world."

Special Features

Suzuki realized the implications of the fact that children the world over learn to speak their native language with ease, and applied the basic principles of language acquisition to the learning of music. The ideas of parent responsibility, loving encouragement, listening, constant repetition, etc., are some of the special features of the Suzuki method.

Parent Involvement

When a child learns to talk, parents function very effectively as teachers. Parents also have an important role as "home teachers" as a child learns an instrument. In the beginning, one parent often learns to play before the child, so that s/he understands what the child is expected to do. The parent attends the child's lessons and the two practice daily at home.

Tips for Parents

Early Beginning

The early years are crucial for developing mental processes and muscle coordination in the young child. Children's aural capacities are also at their peak during the years of language acquisition, and this is an excellent time to establish musical sensitivity.

Listening to music should begin at birth and formal training may begin at age three or four, though it is never too late to begin.

Listening

Children learn to speak in an environment filled with language. Parents can also make music part of the child's environment by attending concerts and playing recordings of the Suzuki repertoire and other music. This enables children to absorb the language of music just as they absorb the sounds of their mother tongue. With repeated listening to the pieces they will be learning, children become familiar with them and learn them easily.

Repetition

When children have learned a word, they continue to use it while adding new words to their vocabulary. Similarly, Suzuki students repeat the pieces they learn, gradually using the skills they have gained in new and more sophisticated ways as they add to their repertoire. Introduction of new technical skills and musical concepts in the context of familiar pieces makes their acquisition much easier.

Encouragement

As with language, the child's efforts to learn an instrument should be met with sincere praise and encouragement. Each child learns at his/her own rate, building on small steps so that each one can be mastered. This creates an environment of enjoyment for child, parent and teacher. A general atmosphere of generosity and cooperation is established as children are encouraged to support the efforts of other students.

Learning with Other Children

Music promotes healthy social interaction,

and children are highly motivated by participating in group lessons and performances in addition to their own individual lessons. They enjoy observing other children at all levels— aspiring to the level of more advanced students, sharing challenges with their peers, and appreciating the efforts of those following in their footsteps.

Graded Repertoire

Children do not practice exercises to learn to speak, but learn by using language for communication and self-expression. With the Suzuki method, students learn musical concepts and skills in the context of music rather than through dry technical exercises. The Suzuki repertoire for each instrument presents a careful sequence of building blocks for technical and musical development. This standard repertoire provides strong motivation, as younger students want to play music they hear older students play.

Delayed Reading

Children are taught to read only after their ability to speak has been well established. In the same way, Suzuki students develop basic competence on their instruments before being taught to read music. This sequence of instruction enables both teacher and student to focus on the development of good posture, beautiful tone, accurate intonation, and musical phrasing. 🎵

Remarkable Life Force

by Shinichi Suzuki

There are branches of Talent Education throughout Japan. Any child can enter without any test, because our principle is based on the premise that talent is not inborn but that every child acquires ability through experience and repetition. For the sake of our children let us educate them from the cradle to have a noble mind, a high sense of values and splendid ability. At our institute we use violin playing to develop these qualities.

All teachers of our Talent Education branches follow this course. Together with parents they spare no effort in guiding children to become noble human beings.

At one branch there was a six-year-old girl who had suffered from infantile paralysis. She was not able to control the right side of her body. When playing “Twinkle, twinkle, little star,” just as she got to the last two notes of the first phrase, her right arm and hand would involuntarily give a violent twitch so that the bow flew out of her hand.

Mr. Yego, the teacher, was very distressed. He asked me for advice. I simply gave the following answer: “Both teacher and parents should accept the fact and keep on.” The teacher patiently went on with lessons, and every day the mother picked up the bow innumerable times. It must have been very hard for her. But the great love and persistent endeavor of both mother and teacher won. The time came when the child was finally able to hold the bow throughout the entire piece.

Don't rush, but don't rest. Patience is an important faculty for achievement.

Ability is one thing we have to produce (or work for) ourselves. That means to repeat and repeat until a matter becomes a part of ourselves. But to have this energy—there lies the problem. There are many people who resolve, “I will achieve this, or that.” Anyone can easily say that, but not all carry out their intentions. They start maybe, but don't really go on and don't put enough strength into their efforts, leaving things half done. There are only a few who go through with their purpose and accomplish things. Whatever work it may be, the way to success is to stick to one's intentions to the very last. Everyone can do it; it depends only on one's will. 🎵

Excerpted from *Nurtured by Love* by Shinichi Suzuki, Summy-Birchard, Inc.

The Parents' Role in Suzuki Education



The Suzuki approach relies strongly on the cooperative relationship of teacher, parent and student in a pleasant, yet disciplined environment. To ensure a successful, enjoyable experience for all, parents must be committed to providing enthusiastic support for the process of learning to play the instrument.

Since Suzuki's approach is modeled on the way children learn to speak their native language, it involves listening, observation and imitation of parent and teacher. The teacher serves as mentor to both parent and child in their study of the instrument, teaching the child at the lesson and guiding the parent in developing techniques for teaching the child at home.

The parents' role involves:

1. *Committing themselves to their own on-going education about the Suzuki approach.*

Read books suggested by the teacher, talk with other parents, and attend parent classes or talks.

2. *Creating a musical environment.*

Play recordings at home on a daily basis, including recordings of current pieces and other good music. Observe lessons of other students; attend group lessons, recitals, and concerts within the Suzuki program and in the community. Make music part of family life by singing, playing with and for friends and family, attending concerts, etc.

3. *Learning the fundamentals of playing the instrument and taking care of it.*

In the beginning, one parent often learns to play before the child. This helps create the

child's desire to play, helps the parent understand what the child is expected to do, and gives the parent first-hand knowledge of the challenges involved in learning to play.

4. *Attending lessons with the child and assisting with practice at home.*

You need not be a trained musician in order to be a good "home teacher." With the teacher's guidance, the parent helps the child with all aspects of learning the instrument. The parent pays careful attention at the lesson so that s/he can follow the teacher's instructions at home during the week.

5. *Creating a total environment of affection, support, encouragement, and understanding.*

Work with the teacher to provide an encouraging environment for the sake of the child.

The most important ingredient for success is the parent's willingness to devote regular time to work closely with the child and the teacher. This requires a commitment from the entire family and may mean rearranging some family priorities in order to receive the full benefits of participation in a Suzuki program. ♣