

SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE SUZUKI METHOD

More than fifty years ago, Suzuki realized the implications of the fact that children the world over learn to speak their native language with ease and began to apply 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.

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 don't discard it but 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. The 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 also 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 the 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.