

History of the Suzuki Method

The Legacy of Shinichi Suzuki

Shinichi Suzuki was a violinist, educator, philosopher, and humanitarian. Over the past fifty years he 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 philosophy and the Method he developed have now reached thousands of teachers, children and families in many nations. When he died in January 1998, Dr. Shinichi Suzuki was mourned around the world. His belief in the marvelous capabilities of all human beings and the importance of nurturing these capabilities with love has left a lasting legacy.

Origin of Suzuki's 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 or one of 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 has 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."*

Through his life and 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-esteem, 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."*