

Suzuki
Piano
Basics
Foundation News

To facilitate, promote, and educate the public on the way of teaching and playing the piano taught at the Talent Education Research Institute in Matsumoto, Japan by Dr. Haruko Kataoka

**Piano Basics
Foundation News**

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Next Deadline: March 25, 2011

Joy of Music

By Haruko Kataoka

From the Matsumoto Suzuki Piano Newsletter

Vol. 5 No. 12, May 23, 1996

Translated by Chisa Aoki and

Teri Paradero

Edited by Karen Hagberg

It was the New Year of my 6th birthday. Even though there were three siblings in our family, only my sister and I were chosen to take piano lessons. Since my mother loved classical music and had amassed a large number of classical recordings (in those days they were in SP record format), I am sure that I had already been listening to good recordings before I started piano lessons. So this was the beginning of my long relationship with music.

It must have been fate to have music in my life. I'm told that I was very driven about piano in the beginning. Being the middle child, my competitive streak was strong. I wanted to beat my sister at everything. I remember being highly motivated to practice so I could advance past her. My sister was laid back and therefore moved slower through the repertoire so eventually I attained my goal. As a result my sister decided that she wanted to quit piano and stopped practicing altogether. My mother who had been so strict about everything for some unknown reason agreed to let her quit. The fact that my mother conceded with my sister about quitting so easily is puzzling to me to this day.

With my competitive impetus gone, my motivation to practice waned and I came to hate piano practice. However, this was the very stage in my life when I truly started to develop my love for music.

I hated to practice but I loved music. And there were so many pieces that I wanted to play. I remember feeling so excited when my piano teacher would tell me to learn the next piece. Though I hated to practice, because I was

forced to practice every day, eventually the piece would take shape. When I was finally able to play a piece well, I would feel so happy and content.

I often reminisce about the time I was in the first year of middle school when I was practicing the Beethoven Waldstein Sonata, the introduction to the second movement and the following *Allegretto* movement (sol sol mi re sol do mi).

It was a cold winter's night. As I was listening to the melody I became transported from present reality into an otherworldliness where I felt indescribable joy. Ever since, I have always wondered in awe about the nature of music. Whether we are happy or sad, music can touch our heart and tame the human being in all of us.

A piano teacher who lived in Kobe during last year's earthquake shared with me an experience that happened during the aftermath. The music of Mozart was audible while she was standing in a long line waiting to receive her water ration at a local schoolyard. As she was listening, something inexplicable came over her. She was so deeply moved that her tears were flowing spontaneously. She was awestruck by the beauty and wonder of

music. Unlike buildings and objects, no matter what happens music can never be destroyed or broken.

I became cognizant of the fact that among all living creatures on this earth, God has granted one thing only to us—the arts. Humans are the only beings who can be soothed by music when we come home tired and weary at the end of the day so that we can awaken to face the next day with renewed energy.

I met a physician in America some time ago who lamented, "Music is your work. Since music can make people happy, you are truly fortunate. On the other hand, doctors have a tough job. We have to deal with unhappy, troubled people on a daily basis."

On the 28th of April, we successfully concluded the eighth 10-Piano Concert. So many individuals who had come to listen to every 10-piano Concert in the past were moved to tears by the music. Though these children are not professionals, their hard work and focused performance affected so many people. The children themselves were pleased that they were able to perform the concert twice. They said that during the first performance they were so nervous and worried that they were not conscious of what they were playing. However, the second time around they really enjoyed their performance.

When we decided to have two concerts because the audience had outgrown the hall, we were concerned that the children would become tired. On the contrary, they took their nervous energy onstage to become immersed in the joy of great music.

Music is a source of so much happiness!

Thoughts on Piano Research, Eat the Pizza and Read the Book

By Rita Burns, Carmichael, California

Have you seen the commercial on television where a group of women in a book club are talking and eating pizza in a living room and a woman asks, "What did you think of the book?" and another woman answers, "Oh, I didn't read the book. I came for the pizza." And then the other women all chime in that they also didn't read the book, and they all proceed happily to eat the pizza as the book club leader looks on somewhat surprised.

For some odd reason, this commercial got me thinking about the weekly get-togethers that I have been enjoying for about a year with Shirlee Rickman and Suzanne Murray here in Sacramento. Our goal for these meetings has not been books or pizza. Our desire to get together came from the noble goal to learn how to play and teach better for the sake of our students: to be able to demonstrate how to practice in the best possible way. But I realize that what really keeps me looking forward to these meetings, like the pizza in the commercial, is the camaraderie with Shirlee and Suzanne.

Unlike the commercial, we *do* play the piano and study. In other words, we have read the book. But I can feel in myself a resistance to getting to the piano and actually playing every week. It is just so enjoyable to talk and enjoy each other's company.



Shirlee Rickman, Rita Burns, and Suzanne Murray at Suzanne's studio for research session.

Please don't misunderstand. I think talking is very important. It is therapeutic. Depending upon your personality, your trust level, your desire to share, there should always be time for just talking about students, parents, retirement, children, health, anything that is occupying your thoughts. Most important is the laughing. We share so many stories about our lives past and present, personal and professional, which are sometimes painful and/or funny.

It requires a certain diligence and initiation among ourselves to get to the piano after some time has been given to conversation. I feel a resistance to play every week. It would be easier not to. It's like exercise for me. I really don't enjoy getting up earlier and getting to the gym. There is that initial feeling to pull up the covers and stay in bed, but I know that I will reap benefits and have a good feeling afterward.

Initially it was important to me to get together with teachers I already knew and liked. We all have busy schedules and were committing to spend a morning a week (sometimes two) opening myself to their comments about my piano playing. This was going to be a regular priority in my busy life. I needed to feel free to express my thoughts and feelings without any fear of judgment. We three have worked together for years, and I felt we could each both learn from and teach each other. I have been teaching for many years and have felt a responsibility to give back to colleagues what has been given to me all of these years. I find that giving back is one of the great joys of getting older. I also know that I have a lot to learn and need feedback from other experienced teachers in order to be the best teacher I can be, and to deal with day-to-day workings with students and parents.

We are three very different personalities. I can see that we each approach teaching somewhat differently. We all bring our personalities, experience, and thought processes to lessons. It is fascinating for me to hear details about their studios. We rotate our meetings at our individual studios. I learn so much just from being in another teacher's studio. Suzanne does group lessons

with her students and their parents. She has lots of energy and has shared some creative ideas to get parents involved. Shirlee just moved into a new studio which is not in her home. In sharing our workspace we share who we are as people. We also invest more in meeting together when each of us hosts the meeting. I think the more we feel like we are contributing to our little group, the more we feel responsible to make it worth our time and effort to perpetuate it.

Our students will only play as well as we demonstrate. It is that simple.

We are currently going through all of the pieces, one by one, both playing and talking about them. We each play the same piece, one after the other. Each rendition sounds different. Sometimes we discuss and/or help one another with how to improve our playing. We demonstrate the teaching points of each piece. We are still in Book 1.

When our students were playing in graduation recitals here in Sacramento in October we focused on the graduation pieces. We three went to Orange County in February to have lessons with Kawamura Sensei and Ogiwara Sensei. Before going we worked on down ups, Twinkles, and the piece we played for our lessons. Sacramento is also preparing for a 10-Piano concert in August. We have lots of work to do with our students. We are so lucky to have this concert where we live, but it is also a huge responsibility to prepare our students. Believe me, we feel the weight of the coming concert. We are highly motivated to continue playing for one another. Our students will only play as well as we demonstrate. It is that simple.

It would be so nice if we could give a lecture, like in college, to our students and teach them good technique and tone with a daily 30-minute talk.

But learning good tone and technique comes from hearing good tone and seeing good technique, not from hearing a bunch of explanations. So we will continue to talk for a while, laugh for a while, and play for a while each week in order that our students will have a more positive experience now in their piano life as well as in their future. I really hope to see all of you in Sacramento in August. It

is worth your time and money to come. It will be especially worth your effort

for your students. If you make it a habit to come, you will learn and improve, and therefore your students will also. There is nothing more meaningful for a teacher than to see the students improve.

If you are fortunate to have another Piano Basics teacher who lives a reasonable distance from you, please consider reaching out. You may consider just meeting for coffee and getting to know each other. It may be someone you've worked with for a while but haven't really had the opportunity to talk with on a more personal basis. I think the personal connection is the first step before moving into research on a regular basis. Playing for one another is a larger step and you needn't rush into. First, it requires trust and a desire to open yourself to feedback about your playing. Take time to get to know each other. Visit each other's studios. Talk about your students and some of your teaching experiences. You will find you have a lot in common. Mutual research can enhance your professional life as well as your personal life. It is not fun doing the work we do by ourselves.

As for a book club, it sounds fun, but is not a priority for me these days. But if you come to Sacramento in August, we can go out together for pizza!

Suzuki Piano Basics Web Site and discussion group:

<http://core.ecu.edu/hist/wilburnk/SuzukiPianoBasics>

Studying at Piano Basics Workshops

By Linda Nakagawa

In February I was very fortunate to be able to attend both Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshops in California and Georgia taught by Ms. Keiko Ogiwara and Ms. Keiko Kawamura. These workshops are so interesting to me because they reinforce my thoughts about teaching.



Kawamura Sensei helping a student at the International Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop in Atlanta, February 2011. Photo by Malinda Rawls.

There were a variety of students at different ages and at different levels in the Suzuki repertoire and beyond. Their level of ability was at varying levels of development whether playing Book I or advanced pieces. The Japanese teachers patiently demonstrated for the students while the students' tone improved. They did not give instructions verbally, but there were lots of words of encouragement as the students tried to get the same sound.

Observing this for ten days again reinforced the realization that I have to improve my own ability to produce a good tone on the piano. That is the only way I will become a better teacher for my students. There is no pressure for me to perform pieces. I am not a performer. I am a teacher. I want to teach my students how to play the piano with ease.

All students can play the notes from the

beginning of a piece to the end if they practice. They do not need a teacher for this. There is no skill development in playing the notes on the piano, other than the ability to play notes. The ability to play notes does not ensure that an ability to make music is happening.

I must be able to demonstrate, to the best of my ability, a most beautiful tone: a single tone that makes the piano sing beautifully. I must be able to demonstrate how to play legato, staccato and chords. I must be able to demonstrate how to use my body so the music sounds like it is breathing and has life. I must be able to demonstrate using my body most efficiently without waste. In essence, I must be able to teach the basics+ of piano playing.



Ogiwara Sensei adjusts posture at the International Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop in Atlanta, February 2011. Photo by Malinda Rawls.

Kataoka Sensei always said that if you can play Book I beautifully with all the best basics+ then everything else is easy. There is much to be learned within the eight books of the Suzuki piano repertoire. We must teach the basics+ with care and thoroughly. If we do, then a wonderful world of piano music will be open to our students.

Don't we all want to become a better teacher for our students!?

Suzuki Piano Basics International 10-Piano Concert
Mondavi Center for the Arts
Jackson Hall
Saturday, August 13, 2011

by Linda Nakagawa

Observation is essential when learning how to teach the Suzuki Method. We are all familiar with the sayings, "Seeing is believing," and "A picture is worth a thousand words." Understanding a philosophy or method of education is easy. Putting it into action with favorable results is the difficult part. The more I teach, the more I want to observe.

The upcoming Suzuki Piano Basics International 10-Piano Concert will be a wonderful opportunity for learning. Keiko Ogiwara, Keiko Kawamura and Manami Tanaka will help conduct the rehearsals and the concert.

This time all rehearsals will be at the Mondavi Center for the Arts beginning on Saturday, July 30. A full dress rehearsal will be held on Friday, August 12. The concert is scheduled for 2:30 the following day.

It is fascinating to watch the Japanese teachers pull the students together for a performance. So much can be learned watching them do this. The teacher has to teach with her whole body and soul. Children use their senses to play together. I hope you will be able to come. Here are the pieces that will be performed:

1. Mozart: Eine Kleine Nachtmusic . duet
2. Brahms: Hungarian Dance No. 5 in F# minor . duet
3. The Bow
4. Folk Song: Twinkles A and D
5. Folk Song: Cuckoo
6. Folk Song: Go Tell Aunt Rhody
7. Chwatal: Little Playmates
8. Anonymous: Musette
9. Hummel: Ecossaise
10. Schumann: The Happy Farmer
11. Bach: Minuet 1
12. Bach: Minuet 2
13. Mozart: Arietta
14. Bach Minuet (last in Book 2)
15. Kuhlau: Sonatina, Op. 55 No. 1 . Allegro
16. Beethoven: Ecossaise . two piano arrangement by Barbara Meixner
17. Mozart: Rondo
18. Mozart: Minuet III (from Minuets with Trio)
19. Bach: Two Minuets
20. Bach: Gigue
21. Beethoven: Für Elise
22. Mozart: Sonata, K. 545 . Allegro
23. Mozart: Sonata, K. 331 . Turkish March
24. Grieg: Hochzenstag auf Troidhaugen (Wedding Day)
25. Weber: Rondo Brillante, Op. 62

Contact Linda Nakagawa at g.nakagawa@comcast.net if you have any questions.

Some Things Are Learned Only by Repetition

By Karen Hagberg

My studio's website has been managed by the father of a student who set it up for me and has until recently made updates whenever I've sent them his way.

A few months ago I asked him to show me how to make the updates myself, and he went through the step-by-step process of doing this. His explanations were very clear. I took good notes. When he left I was confident that I could carry out the procedure on my own.

A few days later I sat down to update the information on one page. When I tried to begin the process I became overwhelmed by the myriad possibilities I hadn't apparently noticed as I was being instructed. When I tried following my notes, that didn't help either. There were too many avenues at each turn. I had no idea how to proceed, and had to call my instructor to confess that I was completely stuck.

He talked me through the simple update over the phone, and I followed his clear instructions. Everything seemed simple and completely obvious. I was not a little chagrined, and assured him I wouldn't have to bother him again.

But then, two weeks later, the same thing happened. "But I'm an intelligent person!" I said to myself. "This can't be!"

Then I thought about all the piano lessons I had watched and all the lessons I have had myself over

the years with Kataoka Sensei and lately with her successors. Good teachers can make everything so clear and so obvious. While a lesson is happening, it is very easy to understand. But then I go home and sit down to practice, and I can hardly recall what the lesson was about. When I try to practice what I was told, I'm not sure if I'm doing it correctly. What was so clear gets murky and unspecific.

Now that I think of it, the same thing happens in my yoga classes. The teacher shows us a new pose that feels really good and beneficial, and when I go home to practice it I can't remember where all my body parts are supposed to be. Whatever I do on my own is not the same thing that felt so good with the teacher.

I conclude that there are certain things that need *lots* of repetition to be learned. And if I can get confused, I imagine how difficult it is for my students and their parents.

So don't worry if you have been studying Suzuki Piano Basics for years, even decades, and still often feel you have no idea what you're supposed to be doing when you practice. *You're not alone!* It means that we all need frequent lessons and as many reminders as we can get. This is why mutual research with colleagues, attendance at workshops, and studying videos of lessons are all so important. The longer we go without these things, the more clueless we become. This learning is like *that* for all of us.

Piano Basics Foundation

Upcoming Workshops/Events

June 20-24, 2011

Louisville, Kentucky

Louisville Suzuki Piano Basics Institute
Contact: Bruce Boiney 502-241-5921
boiney@suzukipiano.com
<http://louisville.edu/music/suzukipiano>

July 30-August 13, 2011

Davis, California

Mondavi Center for the Arts
International Suzuki Piano Basics 10-Piano Concert
Contact: Linda Nakagawa 916-422-2952
g.nakagawa@comcast.net

July 8-11, 2011

Tacoma, Washington

Suzuki Piano Basics Festival with Bruce Anderson
Contact: Jacki Block 253-759-7213
jblock@ups.edu

April 12-29, 2012

Matsumoto, Nagano, Japan

Harmony Hall
International Suzuki Piano Basics 10-Piano Concert
Contact: Karen Hagberg 585-244-0490
kh@hagbergsuzuki.com

July 25-29, 2011

Saint Louis, Missouri

Suzuki Piano Basics Institute with
Joan Krzywicky and Libby Armour
Contact: Patty Eversole 314-837-1881
<http://stlsuzukipiano.tripod.com>
or Jo Anne Westerheide 314-644-0338
jmcwpianov@yahoo.com



The events listed above are for the information of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation members and others. Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation does not endorse, sanction, or sponsor events.

To add or change items on this list and on the Suzuki Piano Basics website, contact Karen Hagberg (kh@hagbergsuzuki.com, 585-244-0490).
