

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**

**Editor**  
Karen Hagberg

**Layout**  
Teri Paradero

**Translators**  
Chisa Aoki  
Teri Paradero

**Production and Distribution**  
Linda Nakagawa

**Send Articles to:**  
**Piano Basics Foundation**  
67 Shepard St. Rochester NY 14620  
kh@hagbergsuzuki.com  
**FAX: 585-244-3542**

**Memberships / Subscriptions**  
Linda Nakagawa  
242 River Acres Drive  
Sacramento, CA 95831  
916-422-2952  
g.nakagawa@comcast.net

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# Don't bang the Keys

**By Haruko Kataoka**

From the Matsumoto Suzuki Piano Newsletter  
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Translated by Chisa Aoki and  
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Edited by Karen Hagberg

Occasionally, we hear the phrase "hit the piano keys." "Bang" is another word to describe the act of playing the piano. This is a terrible word.

Perhaps, because of this phrase, eighty percent of all people who study the piano either bang on the keys or approach the piano more or less looking like they are in violent hand-to-hand combat with it. Those individuals have absolutely no inkling of the awful way they are playing. On the contrary, because of their deep appreciation for the arts and love for piano music, they are merely engrossed with their utmost effort.

So how do you play the piano?

The piano is said to be a percussion instrument and most likely this is the basis of the problem in the way it is played. However, look inside the piano and you will find many strings. The piano is actually a string instrument. The sound of the piano comes from playing the strings. The violin, viola and cello are all string instruments where the string must be played to make sound. If you bang on the piano keys, you will get a very loud sound, of course, but it will be more or less the crashy sound of a collision. The ringing or the resonance of the piano tone will disappear. When you have one crashy tone after another, the result is a succession of noisy sounds. If violinists and violists can be discriminating about their sound, why is there no awareness of sound among pianists?

Perhaps the reason lies in the fact that the piano is a large, very heavy instrument. It is a sturdy instrument that even two or three people cannot lift. As a result, people either bang on the piano with all their might or hang onto (in other words, lean on) the piano and the piano does not budge one bit.

As one can imagine, with the violin, viola and cello being delicately made instruments, they are handled with care. It is inconceivable that someone would bang on such musical instruments. On the other hand, the piano, being so hefty, is apt to be abused.

How do you prevent making the hard, terrible sound that results from banging? It is by escaping the shock of making a tone at the very instant that tone is made. When the body of the person who is playing the piano is natural and relaxed, it becomes the cushion or the shock absorber and thus escape from the shock is made possible. It is absolutely imperative to maintain a relaxed, natural state within the entire body.

On this planet Earth, if you want to create the beautiful sound of music, you must be standing or sitting with the greatest ease, with the mid-line of the body straight, and with a totally empty mind. Then, you must gather the energy within the body's center of gravity while relaxing everywhere else. This condition is the prerequisite for attaining whole body balance.

We are often encouraged to shake our hands from the wrist to release tension. However, our human body must be considered in its entirety lest we be unable to achieve balance and control. Just thinking of the wrist to the fingertips is not enough. Work, in other words, producing musical sound, can begin only when you use the entire body with the support of the lower back to maintain correct posture so the body can move freely.

But we tend to skip this process and focus only on the notes of a piece and to play with just the brain and the hands, totally forgetting about the whole body. The fingers become stiff which causes the body to flail around as it tries to compensate and gain some semblance of relaxation. In this way, a pianist is created who can only produce one kind of sound.

I always come to the conclusion that how you live your life is the same as how you play the piano. In order to be able to live harmoniously with many people in society, effort must be made to be considerate of one another and to quell conflict. The way to live life with vigor and happiness is analogous to the way a piano should be played: without attacking the instrument with the ego, but instead taking care of the piano in order to convey the heartfelt music that musical sound can evoke.

The piano is an instrument with wonderful potential not found in other musical instruments. This is evidenced by the overwhelming number of

compositions that were made for the piano by composers from long ago.

Let's become friends with the piano! Let's practice using and developing our very own

special senses. Let's be able to discern between the sound that has been hit and the musical sound produced from the heart. Please be aware that, if you cannot make a musical sound, it is impossible to truly express music.

### **Scam Alert for Piano Teachers**

Teachers, please be on the lookout for email requests for instruction from people claiming to be from another country, or from a distant state, who want their child to have intensive lessons for a short period of time while they are in your area. They may also appear to want regular lessons. Usually, they ask a number of questions, encouraging you to give out personal information. Apparently, they will offer to pay a large tuition up front either directly to your bank (never give out any information about your bank account), or by check (which turns out to be a bad check). After paying you, they come up with a reason why you need to send them some of the money back before you realize that their check is no good.

This scam has been around for a few years, but it has recently come to our attention that one of our members has received such an email with "Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher" in the subject line of the email, which means that our online list of members has been targeted.

We have nothing to be concerned about if we are on the alert to recognize and report such emails as junk to our server and if we never give out personal information to unknown parties on the internet. As piano teachers, we are usually in need of students and tuitions, but we do not need to be vulnerable to con artists hoping to exploit our situation.

Teachers may notify our Treasurer, Linda Nakagawa ([g.nakagawa@comcast.net](mailto:g.nakagawa@comcast.net)), if they wish to be removed from the online list of members or if they wish that their email address not be published in that list.

# ***Keiko Ogiwara: Address after the International Friendship Concert***

***(Rochester, New York 8/5/12; Sacramento, California, 8/12/12)***

I am very happy to be here in Rochester/Sacramento again, and am so moved to listen to a concert performed by children who have been nurtured by the parents and the enthusiastic teachers who are here attending the workshop.

As you know, in March of last year there was an earthquake in Japan. I cannot imagine the horror and sadness of the people whose lives were devastated by the destruction of the tsunami.

In the midst of such dire adversity, many musicians from all over went to the severely affected areas to perform for the victims. There were students from New Orleans who, after losing their instruments during Hurricane Katrina received new ones from a



Chisa Ogiwara Sensei delivering speech after the International Friendship Concert in Sacramento, California, August 12, 2012.  
Photo by Harvey Woo



Chisa Aoki, Ogiwara Sensei, and Kawamura Sensei after the International Friendship Concert in Rochester, New York on Sunday, August 5, 2012 in the Linehan Chapel, Nazareth College. Photo by Margaret Herbert.

certain high school in Japan. These same students sent musical instruments for a jazz ensemble to the students of the very same high school, who now had lost everything in the tsunami.

So many people who listened to their performance expressed that they felt they were healed by the music and that they had not realized how much music could give them the strength and courage to live. Music is something that is absolutely necessary in our lives.

To continue daily practice at home takes incredible patience, great effort, and concentration. But all this practice becomes worthwhile when a concert such as this with such wonderful music brings pleasure to the performers themselves and to those who are here listening. Please everyone continue to study.

## ***The Summer International Teacher Research Workshops: Impressions from Teachers in Attendance for the First Time***



Lydia White, Brookhaven, Pennsylvania  
Photo by Randolph E. Richardson, Sr.

In Rochester, New York, August 2-6, 2012:

What an exciting week in Honeoye Falls, New York! The wonderful *Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher-Research Workshop* experience has truly impacted my life. I couldn't get home soon enough to put the exceptional lessons *that I* learned into practice.

### ***Lydia White, Brookhaven, Pennsylvania***

I was a lucky young pianist. I grew up down the street from a dedicated new Suzuki piano teacher in the 80's. My parents trusted her hard work and so did I. My teacher, Patricia Palmintier-Pritchard, and my parents gave me so much love and support and took me to many Suzuki workshops over the years. At one workshop when I was eleven, I had the great fortune to have a lesson with Dr. Kataoka. I was impressed with the fact that we hardly needed the translator's help at all. I always came home from those workshops feeling motivated and ready to practice hard.

Fast-forward nearly 30 years. I have just returned home from my first International Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop in Rochester. I am pleased to have those same

feelings of excitement all over again. It was wonderful to observe both teacher- and student-lessons given by Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura. As I sat taking notes over the course of 5 days I could feel my focus growing. As teachers, we already know the importance of patience...yet I walked away with an even better understanding of patient persistence and the great importance of repetition (in both teaching and my own practice). I absolutely loved my lesson time with Keiko Ogiwara. Again I am amazed with how much can be learned in a lesson with only a few important words spoken.

Throughout my stay in Rochester, I felt lucky to be spending time with many other experienced teachers. There were many opportunities to learn from them: starting with our first evening there (spent enjoying a fine meal, great company and rocking chairs on the porch), sharing ideas over lunches, and spontaneous gatherings with the other teachers staying in the same hotel. It was exciting to fly home next to Patricia knowing we could continue our research together back in Louisiana with the rest of our research group. I'm home again, motivated and practicing hard...and I still feel super lucky.



Margaret Hebert with Ogiwara Sensei after the International Friendship Concert in Rochester, New York on Sunday, August 5, 2012 at the Linehan Chapel, Nazareth College. Photo by Brooke Chumachenko.

### ***Margaret E. Hebert, New Orleans, Louisiana***

Sacramento, California, August 9-13, 2012:

In first arriving at the workshop, I was immediately greeted by so many friendly and inviting faces. I was struck by the enthusiasm and genuine love for the Suzuki Piano Method. I must admit that after the first day of observing lessons I was a bit overwhelmed. It was after that day I realized that I needed to start my piano training all over again! Like most of the teachers at the workshop, I was trained in the traditional method from the time I was a child through finishing a Bachelor's degree in Music at UC Davis. When the idea of "starting over" with my training first came to me, I felt a bit disheartened. However, after witnessing the lessons taught by the wonderful Japanese teachers, I became very excited to start "fresh." I was even more encouraged by the many teachers at the workshop who came to me with open arms and open hearts. They helped me realize that we are all learning together and we will always be practicing and improving our

piano playing throughout our whole lives--and what a wonderful life that will be! I am so excited to get to know more of you and even more thrilled at the opportunity to train and study the Suzuki Piano Method!



Devrey Cunningham seated between Ken Matsuda, interpreter, and Connie Snyder, attendee from Oregon, at a dinner for teachers at the home of Linda Nakagawa, Thursday August 9, 2012. Photo by Linda Nakagawa.

***Devrey Cunningham, Davis, California***

## ***Overheard***

***(a new column for which we welcome your contributions!)***

**Book 4 Student:** Why do I have to practice these boring scales every day?

**Mom:** Because Dr. Kataoka said that 85% of all piano music is scales. If you've practiced scales, you'll be able to learn new pieces very quickly (and your grandma will love that)!



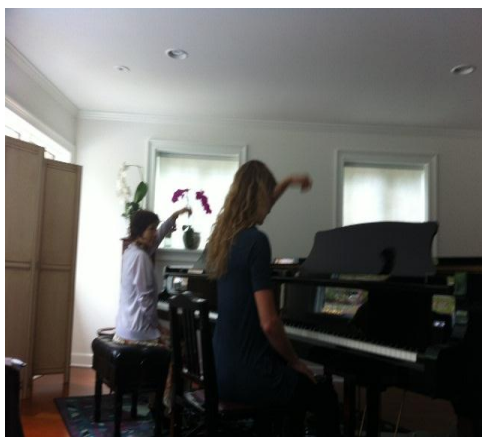
# ***August 2012 Piano Basics Workshops***

***By Linda Nakagawa***

This is a time of reflection for me because I was fortunate to attend both workshops with the Japanese teachers, (Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura) this past August in Rochester, New York and Sacramento, California. I am so grateful to Kataoka Sensei for teaching her young former students to become teachers. Let's work hard together to stay in the precious world of Piano Basics!

These workshops reminded me of the following truths:

1. Suzuki Piano Basics teachers know the importance of having the children listen to the *Suzuki Method, CD, Kataoka Performs Suzuki Piano School volumes 1, 2, and 3.*
2. Suzuki Piano Basics teachers know that all of the basics are introduced and taught in Book 1 and continue forever. Simply learning the order of notes in a piece is not acceptable to Suzuki Piano Basics teachers. It takes 10 years for an ability to be developed. The 8 volumes of the Suzuki Piano Method are like elementary and middle school. They are the foundation of classical piano and only begin to open the wider, wonderful world of music.



Margaret Hebert's lesson in Rochester.  
Photo by Patricia Pritchard.

3. All Suzuki Piano Basics teachers know that it is important to start reading in Book 2. And just a little side note regarding reading: in my opinion, Methode Rose is wonderful for beginning students and the Czerny books that follow are absolutely incredible! They are incredible because Czerny was a master at exhibiting the wide range of musical style that can be produced by the most wonderful instrument, the piano. Czerny accomplished this through his short compositions.
4. All Suzuki Piano Basics teachers know how important it is for the student to start learning scales after learning Minuet 2 in Book 2. (It is very easy for students to learn the scale patterns as they are presented at the end of Methode Rose.)
5. All Suzuki Piano Basics teachers know we must truly listen with our ears and our heart. We must listen to music performed by the best artists. We must learn to listen to our own sound and work to improve it. We must listen to the performances of our own students with concentration and try to help them to improve their tone.

Let us not get confused or distracted. We need patience to keep working on the same basic things in order for something to develop. Sometimes it is difficult to hold on to these values especially when our environment is filled with so many contrary thoughts. There are so many details to work carefully on, it is easy to get frustrated and fall into oblivion. But, we must stay focused! Let's stay in touch with each other and help each other until we see one another again at the next workshop!

# ***Piano Basics Foundation***

## ***Upcoming Workshops/Events***

**October, 5-7, 2012**

**Atlanta, Georgia**

The Atlanta Area Suzuki Piano Association  
with Cathy Hargrave

Contact: Brooke Chumachendo  
[lillmusikmaven@gmail.com](mailto:lillmusikmaven@gmail.com)  
[www.atlantasuzukipiano.org](http://www.atlantasuzukipiano.org)

**August 2013 (exact dates tbd)**

**Rochester, NY**

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop  
with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura  
Friendship Concert featuring students from Japan  
Contact Karen Hagberg 585-244-0490  
[kh@hagbergsuzuki.com](mailto:kh@hagbergsuzuki.com)

**February 21-24, 2013**

**Atlanta, Georgia**

The Atlanta Area Suzuki Piano Association  
with Bruce Boiney

Contact: Brooke Chumachendo  
[lillmusikmaven@gmail.com](mailto:lillmusikmaven@gmail.com)  
[www.atlantasuzukipiano.org](http://www.atlantasuzukipiano.org)

**August 2013 (exact dates tbd)**

**Sacramento, California**

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop  
with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura  
Friendship Concert featuring students from Japan  
Contact Linda Nakagawa 916-422-2952  
[g.nakagawa@comcast.net](mailto:g.nakagawa@comcast.net)

**April 13-28 2013**

**Matsumoto, Japan**

International 10-Piano Concert  
Contact: Karen Hagberg 585-244-0490  
[kh@hagbergsuzuki.com](mailto:kh@hagbergsuzuki.com)

**August 2014**

**Sacramento, California**

International 10-Piano Concert

**July 22-26, 2013**

**Louisville, Kentucky**

Louisville Suzuki Piano Basics Institute  
University of Louisville

Contact Bruce Boiney 502-241-5921  
[boiney@suzukipiano.com](mailto:boiney@suzukipiano.com)  
[www.suzukipiano.org](http://www.suzukipiano.org)



**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](mailto:kh@hagbergsuzuki.com), 585-244-0490).

**Suzuki Piano Basics Web Site and discussion group:**

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