

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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*Childhood Is the
Most Important Time
to Stock Up*

By Haruko Kataoka

From the Matsumoto Suzuki Piano Newsletter
Vol. 8 No. 5, October 5, 1998
Translated by Chisa Aoki and
Teri Paradero
Edited by Karen Hagberg

I have taught music to children for many years. I have come to learn many things over those years through teaching, experience, and research. For us humans, what we experienced in childhood . what we saw, what we heard, what we tasted, what we smelled . are wholly intact in our brains. floppy disk.+The entirety of ones experience becomes a legacy that each individual human adult utilizes throughout his or her lifetime.

Of course, when we are born we are all endowed by the heavens with our own distinctive personalities. This is very

apparent to those of us who have raised more than one child. As parents we must work, as best as we can, with what we have received from the heavens. Next in importance is the child's environment. As I have written before, a good environment becomes the most precious asset granted to a human being. It's like having a lot of money or real estate and never having to work for living. But unlike money or material assets, if given the best environment with myriad experiences that develop intelligence and sensitivity, one can enjoy the rest of life into adulthood. Sadly, it is troublesome that parents who are themselves adults do not truly understand this. The importance of providing the best environment is not something that can be touched or seen like an object, and actually providing it requires a long-term commitment. Even though adults were formerly children themselves, very few adults remember their needs as children.

About two years ago, something happened in the United States that clearly exemplifies this very issue. George is an American. He is a third generation Japanese American. He has a very difficult job as a Correctional Captain for the State of California. His wife, Linda, is a Suzuki Piano teacher. He grew up never having studied Japanese nor did he ever speak it. His mother tongue is English. He claims not to know any Japanese. In the past few years, three or four teachers from Matsumoto have stayed with George and Linda during their August travels. One morning George was in the kitchen getting breakfast ready and one of the Japanese teachers spontaneously offered, in Japanese, "I will get everything ready." George responded, involuntarily, in beautiful, very correct Japanese, "Please

don't bother, I can handle it myself." Having thought that George did not speak any Japanese, this came as a huge surprise for the teacher. But even more amazed was George himself. He does not ever recall speaking Japanese in his whole life. He is absolutely clueless how he was able to speak Japanese.

Upon questioning George about his upbringing, he remembered hearing his grandparents who had emigrated from the Yamaguchi Prefecture speaking Japanese. His parents never spoke Japanese in daily life. (It is possible that his parents were not allowed to speak Japanese during WWII.)

One more thing, to our astonishment, George has been able to conjure up more Japanese gradually since then but always in Yamaguchi dialect. Another teacher is from Hiroshima and is very familiar with this dialect and attested to his accuracy. I was dumbfounded by how magnificently humans are designed that it is possible for George to not only to speak Japanese, but that he would remember the specific way this dialect was spoken. When I encounter actual, real-life situations such as this, my conviction about the absolute importance of a child's education becomes even more fervent.

So please everyone, let's make sure children are listening to the best recordings. Please take them to great concerts. Let's earnestly work hard on providing piano education that involves playing great musical compositions. Regardless of whether children like it or not in the moment, they are able to absorb whatever they experience. Like George, they can count on being able to utilize what they learned fifty years later.

Enrich Your Teaching at an Upcoming Workshop

Whether planning to bring students to the Sacramento 10-Piano Concert or not, please consider the benefits of continuing your education at a Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop. If you have students planning to perform in the 10-Piano Concert, they are encouraged to have a lesson with a teacher from Japan before next summer.

So come to a workshop. Bring students. Students may perform in a spectacular Friendship Concert along with students from Japan and from around the country. Take the energy from the workshop back to your studio for a year filled with motivation and enthusiasm. We look forward to seeing you!

To receive registration materials for Rochester, New York, August 1-5, contact Karen Hagberg kh@hagbergsuzuki.com; for Sacramento, California, August 8-12, contact Linda Nakagawa g.nakagawa@comcast.net; for Atlanta, Georgia, January 30-February 3, 2014, contact Pam Smith pamelaspianostudio@gmail.com; and for Phoenix, Arizona, February 6-10, 2014, contact Gloria Elliott gelliott@aol.com.

Overheard

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

Mother of 4-year-old: She sits at the piano here at your studio, but I can't get her to practice at home.

Suzuki Teacher: Come to lessons, listen to the recording constantly. Let her experience other children playing the piano as often as possible. Begin establishing a practice routine by doing five minutes or fewer, more than once a day if possible. Relax!

Changes:

Benjamin Smith

2013 Matsumoto 10-Piano Concert Reports from Students

Many New Experiences

Even after over two weeks staying in Matsumoto for the 10-Piano Concert rehearsals, I felt these piano rehearsals were very new to me. They inspired me to play the piano as if I loved it.

I thank the Lim family for their hospitality and for introducing me to new foods and different ways of living. The weather was much colder than Southern California, so when I came back home I felt really hot.

I learned a lot from this experience. I felt very good after I played my piece in the 10-Piano Concert. The experience of this trip I will never forget. I would like to go back one day.

Hans Hwang, 13, student of Mei Ihara, Orange County, California

Matsumoto Reflections

My time in Japan was absolutely lovely. The whole trip was so amazingly incredible that I find myself at a loss for words.

I am so glad that I was able to experience such a big part of the culture in Japan and marvel at its wonderful beauty. Not only did I get to see the famed *sakura*, which are beautiful, pale pink flowers that bloom by the hundreds on trees, (which are, by far, way better than pictures could ever depict), but I got to try lots of interesting, new foods, all of which I enjoyed.

The very first thing I noticed when we got off the plane was how fresh and clean the



Renee Susanto and Hans Hwang during rehearsals for the Matsumoto 10-Piano Concert.

air was. The cool, crisp breeze felt really nice after being cooped up for a good twelve hours. I also noted during my stay here how everyone was extremely respectful and polite to one another. It was a true joy to be able to experience a big part of the culture in Japan as well as to be able to see the beauty of Matsumoto, and appreciate all that it has to offer.

This trip was filled with so many memories and humorous moments that I will cherish and keep very near and dear to my heart.

I want to take a moment to say thank-you.

I wish to give huge thank you to my parents for their constant love and care for me, and of course, for their immense support in all of my endeavors.

Also, I wish to express appreciation to my piano teacher, Mrs. Ihara for providing the opportunity to perform in Japan, at the 10-Piano Concert. Without her, none of this would have been possible, and I truly do think that, in the ten years I've known her,

she has taught me things that have shaped who I am today.

To all of the teachers, those who lead the rehearsals and the ones who observed all the rehearsals from early in the morning to late at night, your tireless dedication and hard work is something I will not take for granted. Your patience and the time you took to help us improve our pieces was a big factor in the success of our concert. I, myself, was truly amazed at how everything seemed to come together on the concert day; how everyone played in unison; and how everyone gave one-hundred percent. The pieces, from backstage sounded excellent and very beautiful, especially the tone quality.

I want to especially give a thank-you to my host family, the Higuchi family, who always went out of their way to help accommodate

me. I really felt the warmth of your hospitality and love. I cannot even begin to explain how thankful I am for your generosity and for all the time and hard work you put into my stay. I truly felt a part of your family for those two weeks. Your crazy antics, which kept me up late into the night and woke me early in the morning, will never fail to amuse me, and I will always remember your kindness and your vibrant personalities.

To all of the friends I made, thank you for making my stay all the more worthwhile. Your laughter will forever echo in my heart, and I will remember all of the jokes and memories we share together. I hope to remain in touch, and make sure to contact me if you all guys ever come to Southern California.

Thank you, from the very bottom of my heart.

Renee Susanto, 13, student of Mei Ihara, Orange County, California

Observations after the Matsumoto 10-Piano Concert, April 27, 2013

By Mei Ihara, Orange County, California

I attended the 10-Piano Concert in Matsumoto again this spring. Matsumoto was as beautiful as ever in April. We enjoyed the *sakura* (cherry blossoms), the many other spring blooming flowers, and Matsumoto Castle; and we enjoyed breathing the fresh, cool spring air every day.

The most important and special thing I experience each year is the music. During all the rehearsals, I could hear how every single note and every single phrase was being polished. ♪Down-up, down-up; Twinkle, Twinkle. Teachers and students were working together and never gave up until the job was done. It was amazing.

Nothing was new, but each year the results are so refreshing.

Music itself is beautiful, but if the music is played without heart and tone, it will never touch the listener's heart and soul.

Yes, the 10-Piano Concert was awesome. The performers played with all their hearts

and souls. I came home with their beautiful tone in my heart and in my body. The sound of the music is still ringing in me.

I would like to thank all the Japanese *Sensei* and host families who provided the opportunity for all us Americans. Thank you! *Arigato!*



Teachers and students from Southern California after the Matsumoto 10-Piano Concert, April 27, 2013. From L to R: Teacher Rae Kate Shen, Hannah Marie Arnott (age 16) student of Rae Kate Shen, Hans Hwang (age 13), student of Mei Ihara, Renee Susanto (age 13), student of Mei Ihara, Steve Hwang (father of Hans), and Teacher Mei Ihara.

Saying Farewell to a Long-Term Family

By Karen Hagberg

This month a family I have taught for over 20 years finally stopped coming to my studio upon the high school graduation of the youngest of their three children. For work-related reasons, they are just now also moving to another state.

This family has been coming to me for lessons since November of 1992, shortly

after my return from study in Japan. I could say that they have been here throughout my career as a Suzuki Piano Basics teacher. I began by teaching the first son, then added the second and the third. The first went on to college and became a professional musician, the second graduated high school to attend our community college, and the third will

attend college in Ohio, where the family is going to be living. The other two boys are going on to college in different fields. This family came to me at 7 a.m. every Saturday morning.

The commitment of time and money that they made over the years always impressed me. The father was a person who wished he had had more music education as a child and vowed to give that to his children. I don't recall how this family found me, just back from Japan and not having much of a reputation out there yet, but I do recall the first phone call from the mother. She and I liked each other immediately during that very first phone call. I was thrilled to get a student at that point, and looked forward to meeting her and her 6-year-old son. This was before her third son was born.

The little boy, as he describes it now, was dragged kicking and screaming to piano lessons. He obviously did not like the idea at all. He was difficult to teach. His body was stiff and uncoordinated. He was slow to learn the pieces- very slow. He took three years to get through Book 1, and as he approached this milestone I wondered how I would ever bring him into the Book 2 pieces. There were many times along the way that I asked myself if this student would ever learn to play the piano, times when I felt like giving up on him, feeling guilty, knowing Suzuki Piano Basics teachers are not supposed to feel that way.

He graduated from Book 4 in his junior year of high school and transferred to another teacher after deciding to apply to college as a music major. I am ashamed to admit that I did not encourage his ambition, seriously doubting his ability to go on to study music at the college level. I am sure he went to the other teacher because of my shocked and dubious

reaction upon hearing that he had decided to become a musician. (I remember thinking, %Why didn't he tell me this before now, when I could have taken him more seriously and had time to prepare him?+) The truth is that I had never even entertained any thought that he might go on in music. In that regard, I had given up on him.

After he left my studio, I was dismayed to see what the other teacher did, or did not do, with whatever technique I had tried to teach him. Whenever I saw him play his body was increasingly stiff, and his sound increasingly harsh. I *really* threw up my hands at that point. I was discouraged. All those years of lessons had gone nowhere, and I had only myself to blame. I continued to teach the younger two brothers, both of whom were slow and uncoordinated, much like their older brother. But the parents continued to bring them to lessons without fail, week after week, year after year.

The older boy visited occasionally on breaks from college. He would describe what various piano teachers were teaching him. He went through a period of swaying his body all around and flapping his elbows as he played. He graduated from college and attended graduate school at another university where he had yet another piano teacher who had still different ideas about how to play. By this time he had performed numerous recitals and had accompanied all kinds of musicians. He became a fabulous reader and a very quick study.

At this point, he and I were having conversations as colleagues when he Visited. He told me about all the various ways that teachers had told him to play, and how earnestly he had tried every one.

Miracle of miracles, he finally came to the conclusion that the best way to play was the way I had taught him years before: to sit still and up straight, to open his ears, and to move his fingertips. He returned to that way of playing and suddenly not only did he have facility learning difficult pieces, but he had relaxed, natural technique and beautiful sound. Truly, he has become a wonderful musician and a highly accomplished accompanist. He earned a master's degree in music education and is now applying for his first teaching position. He is a far better pianist than I ever was.

Why do I tell this story? Here were three boys from very earnest and dedicated parents. All three found piano study to be a huge challenge, but the parents never gave up on them even though they saw other students around them moving along at a much faster pace. They gave their children piano lessons throughout their school years. They came at 7 a.m. on Saturday mornings in order to fit in these lessons around sports and other activities (the two younger brothers became Eagle Scouts). One brother was to become a professional musician, but it was impossible to know that in the beginning. He didn't know where these piano lessons would lead, nor would his parents, nor would I. He was a clueless 6-year-old, like most children that age. He was what might be called "untalented" or unsuited for this activity. Most parents would have given up. Most teachers would have given up. After the first ten years, I am ashamed to say I had given up.

We never know what the future holds for a child. The great pianist Martha Argerich demonstrated amazing ability at the very young age and adults around her decided she would become a pianist. Today she regretfully reports that, given a choice, she would have become a doctor.

We might ask ourselves, who is leading the happier, more integrated life, my former student or the great pianist?

Dr. Kataoka always said that her goal in teaching students was simply not to cripple them to the point that they could not go on in piano if they decided they wanted to. To that end, she emphasized training the ear and keeping the body in its most natural and relaxed state. Education at its best provides possibilities for the student. It does not decide a child's future.



Karen Hagberg with Wooten family on last day in Hagberg Studio, June 19, 2013.

*Welcome,
New Members!*

Cheng Family

Melody Garber

Paula R. Mazuski

Piano Basics Foundation

Upcoming Workshops/Events

July 26-29, 2013

Tacoma, Washington

Suzuki Piano Basics Festival with Rita Burns
University of Puget Sound
Contact: Jacki Block 253-759-7213
jblock@ups.edu

January 30-February 3, 2014

Atlanta, Georgia

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop
with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura
Contact Pam Smith 770-457-5144
pamelaspianostudio@gmail.com

August 1-5, 2013

Rochester, New York

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

February 6-10, 2014

Phoenix, Arizona

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop
with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura
Contact Gloria Elliott 623-466-7447
gelliott50@aol.com

August 8-12, 2013

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

August 2014

Sacramento, California

International 10-Piano Concert
Contact Linda Nakagawa 916-422-2952
g.nakagawa@comcast.net

April 2015

Matsumoto, Japan

International 10-Piano Concert
Contact Karen Hagberg 585-244-0490
kh@hagbergsuzuki.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).

Suzuki Piano Basics Web Site and discussion group:

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