

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

10-Piano Concert 2015 Fresh Perspectives

By Karen Hagberg



Performers for J.S. Bach *Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring*, Matsumoto 10-Piano Concert, 2015. Photo by Malinda Rawls.

Piano Basics Foundation News

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Next Deadline: June 15, 2015

We have been reporting news of the 10-Piano Concerts in Matsumoto and in Sacramento for over two decades, during which time over a hundred fortunate students from the United States and Canada have had the opportunity to travel to Japan, and at least as many Japanese students have come to the United States to participate in these events.

This exchange has been going on for so long that it becomes tempting for us to take it for granted. There is a routine involved that never changes. Teachers push themselves to their mental and physical limits to eke out every possible moment of rehearsal time in the last two weeks leading up to the performance. Ten-hour days are not unusual. There is just one day off in those last fourteen. By the end of the first week, parents, some of whom are transporting their guest visitors as well as their own children to regular rehearsals (and to the inevitable extra ones called for *õproblemõ* pieces) begin to look frazzled and, frankly, worried. Tensions rise.

Performers sense their responsibility to the nine others in their group. They practice as they have never practiced before.

All of this results in a magical eventô every time.

The Matsumoto 10-Piano Concert this year was attended by two American teachers who, themselves, were brought up in the Suzuki Method. Ben Smith, having attended multiple

10-Piano events both in Japan and in Sacramento, brought two students with him. Karen Huffman was in attendance for the first time. Fortunately for us, these two young teachers are wonderful writers and capture the essence of the 10-Piano experience in their own unique way. Ben reports on an õextra-curricularö experience provided to the six American students, and Karen uses Japanese mythology to portray the miracle of the event.

What teacher would not want to attend the concert after reading these reports? What parent would not want their child to have this opportunity?

Matsumoto 10-Piano Concert: Reflections from a First-Timer

By Karen Huffman

Karen Huffman has just opened her new studio in Portland, Oregon after teaching in Dallas, Texas for six years. She has three wonderful young students and is excited to welcome many more. She grew up taking Suzuki piano lessons from Cathy Hargrave and continued training with her as a teacher for several years before moving to Oregon. She holds a Bachelors in Film/Animation from Rochester Institute of Technology and a Masters in Music Education – Piano Pedagogy from Southern Methodist University.

A favorite legend from Shinto mythology tells the story of *Amaterasu*, goddess of the sun and *Ame-no-Uzume*, the goddess of love, happiness and dawn and the patron of performing arts, and how the performing arts came to be. One day, Amaterasu's brother *Susano'o*, the god of sea and storms, became furious with Amaterasu's lack of trust in him and he began destroying rice fields and, acting against important cultural taboos, vandalized Amaterasu's heavenly home.

Amaterasu became so angry and ashamed that she hid herself in a cave, plunging the world into darkness. As crops began dying and evil *oni* [demons] started roaming the earth, the 800 other Gods gathered before Amaterasu's cave, trying to tempt her back out into the world.

Finally, Ame-no-Uzume hung a mirror on a nearby tree and then began dancing wildly on top of an upturned boat. When the other Gods saw her dancing, they all began laughing and clapping and making "sounds of life." Amaterasu, curious about all the noise, peeked out of her cave and immediately became enchanted with her own reflection in the mirror hanging on the tree. Before she could turn and hide again, the Gods swooped in and closed off the cave, returning light and life to the world.

Ame-no-Uzume's dance became the first performing art and many of the traditions in kabuki theater are believed to have descended directly from her performance. I find it fascinating and incredibly important

that the Gods of Shinto legend did not use complicated magic or godly powers to save the world, just the sound of laughter and joy in response to Ame-no-Uzume's dance. To me, the popularity of this story and the attitude I have observed toward the teachers here really emphasizes the importance of the arts in Japanese culture to this day. When I hear the children rehearse their pieces, from Twinkles to Liszt, I think I know why Amaterasu came out of hiding and I think there is something we can learn.

Every day for the two weeks leading up to the 10-Piano Concert, the students gather to rehearse their performance. Before each rehearsal, they rush to their piano and take the last few minutes to practice their piece on their own. Of course, when they practice this way at home or in their individual lesson, the result of this diligence is beautiful music. When there are ten of them practicing different things in the same room all at once, the result is just cacophony! But as the teacher steps up to begin rehearsal, silence descends and then, sometimes after a couple false starts, ten sets of fingers begin moving together.



Karen Huffman backstage at Harmony Hall, April 26, 2015. Photo .by Malinda Rawls.

Working together, the students transcend

what was written on the page given to them months before and they create a sound as majestic and otherworldly as the mountains outside their window. The sound reverberates around the room and certainly brings happiness to anyone listening. It is a unique and moving opportunity and an enormous reward for the clear amount of hard work the students have put into their preparation.

As pianists, I think this is an inspirational and important opportunity. We have relatively few chances to play together, particularly as young students, and I think we therefore miss out on much of the joy and magic of music making. The opportunity to play with nine other pianists really allows our students to go above and beyond what they hear every day and inspires them to continue their study and bring joy out into the world.

As a teacher observing this event for the first time, I know this opportunity doesn't just magically appear. It takes an incredible amount of effort. I am impressed by the amount of practice required by each student and that most of them clearly do it. I am impressed by the teacher dedication and cooperation. I am impressed by the ability developed by each and every student. And as we near the final performance, I am impressed by the sound coming together in each piece.

But I knew before I came that this would be impressive.

In the end, I know now there is more to this than just putting on a good show. Yes, of course, I want my students to learn to play along with others, to learn to polish a piece to its highest level, to wear a glamorous outfit as they bow to a sea of applause. But I also want them to smile and bow awkwardly to someone who speaks a totally different language and to stumble over memorized foreign phrases. I want them to eat "weird" food that challenges their cultural conception

of "normal." I want them to remember forever that we can all make dumb mistakes no matter how much we practice or what country we are from. And I want them to open their eyes to the world beyond their front door and take a step that feels like a giant leap.

Listening to the beautiful tone pour from ten pianos every day and knowing that just outside the cherry trees are frothing with blooms beneath the soaring mountains, I find it easy to know the pure joy experienced by the 800 Gods outside the cave in the Shinto legend and why it was irresistible for Amaterasu to investigate. And I know why

coming together to make music must play such an important role in our lives. Dr. Suzuki once said that it was music that would change the world. In a world often darkened by hatred and cruelty, the joy and beauty of music created in an event like the 10-Piano Concert reminds us that we can rise above these things and, working together, bring about that change. Each time we play together, each kind interaction, each friendship developed so far across the ocean; all come together and create an arm reaching out from one culture to another bringing tolerance, joy, and most important, love.



Final remarks by Ogiwara Sensei after Matsumoto 10-Piano Concert, April 26, 2015.
Photo by Malinda Rawls

Japan 10-Piano Concert 2015: Six American Students Visit Seinan Junior High School

By Benjamin P. Smith

Benjamin Smith grew up as a Suzuki Student and began teaching in 2000 for the Community Music program at the University of Puget Sound. He has a thriving studio of 25 students in Tacoma, Washington and has attended

the past three consecutive 10-Piano events in Japan and California. Previously he attended several Sacramento 10-Piano events and studied in Matsumoto with Dr. Kataoka.

Most of us reading this newsletter work with students in

the United States, and all of the visiting students at this year's 10-Piano Concert in Matsumoto attend American schools. There are many cultural differences between schools in Japan and the States. One of the most interesting to me is the value that the Japanese students place on their school building and grounds as they work to clean and maintain them daily. The American students experienced this first hand when we were invited to attend a half day of classes at Seinan Junior High.

I was asked to be the chaperone for the six visiting American students and I gladly said "Yes!" as I had visited the school 15 years ago and had enjoyed the beautiful drive there.

We were picked up by Mr. Koiwai, the art teacher at Seinan Junior High. We all packed comfortably into a white Toyota minivan and began our road trip to the rural school. Most of the trip is on a narrow, two-lane road that winds and twists its way through the mountains. Evergreen trees blanketing the hills were punctuated by clouds of pinkish white Sakura blossoms. Contrasting the greens of springtime grassy fields were the earthy browns of rice fields waiting to be flooded into vast reflecting mirrors.

The sky that day was alternately a misty white and light blue between the ever present clouds. In the distance through the mist we could see the snowy jagged peaks of the Japan Alps. The road bore straight through a mountain in a tunnel dark and cold. At one point just before we arrived we drove under a green roof that covered the entire road as it twisted and turned

tightly around the hillside. We all wondered out loud what it was for. Mr. Koiwai told us it was a snow tunnel, designed to keep the road clear of snow in the long winters.

After a 45-minute drive we pulled up to the school, a beautiful, two story rectangular structure set in roughly a horseshoe pattern with a Japanese garden in the center. The buildings are connected with covered, open air, outdoor walkways. The garden has traditional bamboo fencing (made by the Art Teacher) as well as flowers, shrubs and a flagstone walkway. We were met by the English teacher, a friendly woman, wearing a brown sport jacket and jeans, as well as the T.A., an American college grad who had lived for six years in the District and was assisting with the English classes.

The American students took off their shoes in the entryway, put on some borrowed slippers, and began their day with the students and teachers at Seinan. We walked down the hall to our left into a conference room with a large wooden table where we were offered green sencha tea and special strawberry-jam filled treats from Kyoto. We were given our schedules for the day and then taken to the music hall. As we walked down the hall we noticed that most of the building was made of natural finished wood, and the classrooms had sliding doors that opened into the halls. Each classroom also had large windows looking into the hall and outside to the rural setting of Seinan. The Music room had natural wood floors and a large black grand piano with the names of the visiting students pasted up in large letters on the blackboard.

As we walked into the Music hall all the students were seated and dressed in their school uniforms, light blue track pants with a white racing stripe running the length with matching jackets and white running shoes. As we sat down in the front of the class, the Japanese students stood and with one voice sang their school song accompanied by a student playing the grand piano. After a formal welcome from the principle and the students, each American student introduced themselves and then performed a piano piece. The Japanese students were listening intently and I heard some whispers of "cool" when there was a particularly exciting moment in the

performance. After the final performance by Aaron there was lots of applause and more smiles!

We then split into two groups (I was free to visit, going back and forth between the groups). One group worked on Sumi Calligraphy, learning to write names in Kanji [Chinese characters]. Each American student was surrounded by a team of Japanese students who cheered them on and taught them how to paint their own name in Kanji using traditional Sumi paint, brush and paper! There were lots of laughs and the Japanese cheered the American students' efforts in English.

The American students were presented with Sumi calligraphy drawn by the Japanese students. Each student left with a stack of Sumi art to take home, as well as a basic understanding of this traditional art form from Japan.

While the Sumi class was painting and conversing, the other class was playing a game where English words and questions were used to play Bingo. The room was a buzzing hive of students from both cultures asking each other questions such as, "Do you snowboard?" "Can you run fast?" "Do you like pork?" A game of "Rock, Paper, Scissors" was used to determine who would ask the questions and who would answer. You can imagine the laughter and noise in this classroom! I saw the students getting comfortable, talking with each other and having fun as they began to communicate with each other. After the game, the students broke up into conversation pods, where more questions were asked about their preferences,

questions ranging from sports to foods, all in English.

After the period was over, the classes switched.

We had a brief break after both classes and were ushered into the tatami room, complete with a view of the garden through open sliding doors and a traditional kotatsu. The American students enjoyed sitting on the tatami mats, feet under the warm kotatsu table with the traditional quilt around their laps. (A kotatsu is a small table with a heater built into the center and a quilt that is also built into the table edges: ones feet go under the table, the quilt wraps around ones waist and the lower half of the body stays toasty warm while eating or studying! This used because many Japanese homes and buildings lack central heating) Local newspaper reporters came by to interview the students about their impressions and to take a picture. (The article was written and published the following week!)

When our break was over we walked back to the same classrooms and watched the Japanese students, some dressed in food handling clothes, serve their own lunches. The desks were arranged to make small social groups. The *ōishiō* (delicious) lunch was 100% made in-house from fresh ingredients, and most ingredients were locally grown. A healthy serving of rice, miso soup with local veggies, Gyoza (potsticker dumplings), stirfried bean sprouts with veggies and a bottle of milk.

During lunch there was a lot of talk with questions among the students about their favorite music, sports and tv shows. I was invited to eat with the students as well. I couldn't help compare this to the last time I visited a student for lunch in my city and saw with dismay the unhealthy, processed, preservative-rich, frozen foods being served. To me there was a vast difference between the locally grown and lovingly made food that the students in Japan were being served and the heavily processed factory food that students in American schools consume.

We all cleaned our tables and sorted the dishes for the kitchen staff. When lunch was over all the students had a break. We went into the Gym and played pickup basketball in our socks, well... the boys and I played

with one of the staff. The girls talked and took pictures! We had a good game going until a musical theme began playing over the loudspeakers, (I think it was a Vivaldi concerto.) It was time to clean the school! The boys got into gym shorts and went shirtless tying a *ōHachimakiō* cloth around their forehead. The girls wore shorts and white t-shirts. Soon the halls were reverberating with shouts of the school motto as small groups of students swept, mopped, dusted and cleaned their school. As they cleaned they shouted their three-syllable school motto to each other letting the sound encourage and build inner strength to work. The school is completely cared for and cleaned by the students. All of them work; they all have a place to help, even the special needs kids. Everyone has a purpose and is part of making their school a better place.

After 20 minutes of cleaning, the same classical music was played over the loudspeakers and the students gathered into small groups to talk briefly about their work, encourage one another and then change back into their school uniforms. While the students were cleaning we toured the other classrooms: the computer lab, woodworking shop, art room, science lab. We also visited the kitchen where we thanked the chef and staff for the delicious homemade lunch. We shouted *Gochi so sama desu!* (That was a delicious meal!) and got a lot of smiles for that!

Our visit was over in what felt like minutes, but in reality we had been at Seinan for several hours. As we were getting ready to leave we were invited to participate in a closing ceremony.

Japanese and Americans were asked to share their thoughts and experiences about the day. What I heard, gave me great hope for our future together. There was so much mutual respect, and a deep curiosity to learn and experience more of the other's culture from both the Japanese and the Americans. We closed with a heartwarming calling out of the school motto as a group and then we emerged outside to the garden to take group pictures. After the pictures (which included, saying "sushi" and "cheese" and discovering a family of frogs hiding in a rotting stump near where we were sitting...), we went into the conference room and gathered our bags and coats. As we put our own shoes on in the entryway and prepared to walk outside, the teachers were smiling and laughing as they made a human tunnel for us to walk through passing out high fives, handshakes and smiles! We all felt a deep appreciation for Seinan, the students, teachers and staff that make it such a special place.

As we settled into the white minivan for the drive back to Matsumoto, I felt that here we had touched on a part of Japanese culture that the American students could relate to deeply. I wondered how many lives had been changed with this exchange of culture, how many minds had been opened to new possibilities and ways of doing things. As we drove the twisty mountain roads, there was the low hum of conversation as Six American students talked about their day, the fun they had, their favorite Japanese friends, and how much they enjoyed this cultural exchange. We stopped at a viewpoint for the Alps and took pictures. As we were snapping photos and laughing, I remember thinking: This is one of the key reasons why we do these international 10-Piano events, to create opportunities for the students to be immersed in a beautifully different culture as they participate in Art, Conversation, Fun, Sports, Food, and Friendship. I believe I saw the beginnings of a deep appreciation and love for the people and customs of another culture being cultivated within the hearts of these six American students:

Gabriel Lau (age 12, Gig Harbor, Washington)
James Lear (age 15, Lake Tapps, Washington)
Matt Li (age 13, Fremont, California)
Aaron Masahiro Romney (age 19, Sandy, Utah)
Sarah Schuette (age 14, Carmichael, California)
Renee Susanto (age 15, Orange, California)



View from classroom at Seinan Junior High School, April 2015. Photo by Benjamin Smith.



Learning to write western names in Kanji at Seinan Junior High School, April 2015. Photo by Benjamin Smith.



Benjamin Smith with his students Gabriel Lau and James Lear at Seinan Junior High School, April 2015.

Kataoka Sensei's Lessons Available to Observe Online

Our web editor, Ken Wilburn and SPBF member Carol Wunderle have worked over the past few years to make videos of Dr. Kataoka's lessons available to our members online. Recently, Ken provided us with instructions (below) to access this amazing archive which is growing as our members provide Ken with our personal stores of videos from workshops over the years.

Members, please send your videos, regardless of format, that may be collecting dust in your homes and that are surely on their way to decomposition, to Ken so that they may be preserved on the internet for future research by teachers, parents and students. It is also a good idea to contact the families of former students who may have had lessons with Dr. Kataoka to contribute their videos as well. Please identify, as much as possible, the date and place of the lessons. Teacher lessons will not be included, and students are not identified by name.

Videos may be sent to: Professor Kenneth Wilburn
History Department, Brewster A318
East Carolina University
East Fifth Street
Greenville, North Carolina 27858-4353

Please report any difficulty you may have viewing the videos to Prof. Wilburn at wilburnk@ecu.edu Thank you!

Study with Teachers from Matsumoto!

Experience Suzuki Piano Basics teaching *from the source* at the two workshops this summer featuring teachers (those who direct the Matsumoto and Sacramento 10-Piano Concerts) and students from Japan.

The first will be in Rochester, New York on July 31-August 4 and the second in Sacramento, California on August 8-12. Both places will host a Friendship Concert in which American students will perform with Japanese students.

Please consider taking advantage of this opportunity for you, and possibly your student(s), to participate in one of these amazing events. You will be glad you did! (See Upcoming Events for contact information.)

Piano Basics Foundation Upcoming Workshops/Events

June 22-26, 2015

Conway, Arkansas

Suzuki Piano Basics Five Piano
and Chamber Workshop
with Bruce Anderson, Rita Burns and Bruce Boiney
Contact Pam Werner 501-425-2862
info@suzukiprg.org, www.suzukiprg.org

Friday, July 31-Tuesday, August 4, 2015

Rochester, NY

Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop
with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura
Contact Karen Hagberg 585-978-0600
kh@hagbergsuzuki.com

July 17-20, 2015

Tacoma, Washington

Suzuki Piano Basics Summer Festival
with Rita Burns
Contact Jacki Block 253-759-7213
Jblock@ups.edu

Saturday, August 8-Wednesday, August 12, 2015

Sacramento, California

Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop
with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura
Contact Linda Nakagawa 916-422-2952
g.nakagawa@comcast.net

July 20-24, 2015

Louisville, Kentucky

Louisville Suzuki Piano Basics Institute
Contact Bruce Boiney 502-241-5921
boiney@suzukipiano.com
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, 585-978-0600).

Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation: General Membership Meeting

The meeting of the General Membership will take place during the Suzuki Piano Basics Institute at the University of Louisville, date and time to be announced. At this meeting the following slate of officers will be presented for approval by members present:

President: Karen Hagberg
Vice President: Renee Eckis
Treasurer: Linda Nakagawa
Secretary: Rae Kate Shen

Members may submit nominations for these offices to our Nominations Chair, Ann Taylor ann@anntaylorstudio.net, before May 30, 2015. Agenda items for this meeting may also be submitted to Karen Hagberg before that date.