

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

Love Is...

By Haruko Kataoka

From the Matsumoto Suzuki Piano Newsletter
Vol. 7 No.5, October 9, 1997
Translated by Chisa Aoki and
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Piano Basics Foundation News

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Next Deadline: December 15, 2015

Love, to love, are words that the academic world is fond of using often, but what do they really mean specifically or in concrete terms? What is the effect of love on human beings? For such a word to be used so frequently or commonly, I have wondered for a long time why its meaning seems so vague. I have now come to this conclusion: Love is joyfully doing for another things that are difficult, tiresome, annoying and troublesome.

For instance, a mother delights in thinking about what kind of delicious snack she can provide her children. She can conveniently purchase something that is available at the grocery store, but no, she would rather spend the time making a cake from scratch with her own hands. Here's another example: preparing tea for special guests to relish, from making sure that the temperature of the water is just right to carefully heating the tea pot, not leaving out a single detail to make flavorfully exquisite tea. The cake, the tea, all made with heartfelt delight to be enjoyed by others.

In society we have the example of altruistically giving to provide even a little respite from suffering to the poor. This is the kind of deed that cannot be undertaken without love.

It is the same with how the piano is played or how one practices piano, being aware of each and every tone, producing musical sound for each and every note. Unless you gather your strength in your center of gravity while releasing tension, and unless you achieve good balance with awareness of what to control in order to absorb any shock when the finger comes in contact with the piano keys for

every single note, you will not be able to produce musical sound filled with warmth and love. When you can accomplish this kind of meticulous care in your performance, you can bestow joy to those who are listening. If, on the other hand, you have the attitude that any sound is fine as long as you are playing what is written in the score without taking diligent, conscientious care of your sound, there will be no heart, no soul, just bad music.

This also applies to practice in the home. Because parents adore their children, they help them practice. However, children do not have plans or aspirations for the future and are therefore not self-motivated. They hate to do any kind of difficult practice. To force them to practice is not a pleasant task. Insisting that they practice requires great effort. However, good practice is possible when parents assume the role of being the parents, because parents possess an overflowing abundance of love for their child.

This principle holds true also in the case of daily discipline within home life. Rather than being strict, it is so much easier for a parent to let their children just have fun every day. Regardless of how annoyed their child becomes, however, parents continue daily to say the same things over and over precisely because of their love for their children.

Generally in society, love is mistakenly interpreted as something clingy and sugary. I believe that we have steadfastly to overcome such sentiment and endeavor to nurture human beings who accept, relish and fulfill challenges. As more conveniences become prevalent in the world, people dislike doing anything difficult. It concerns me to think that there is less and less love in the world.

As I was writing down these thoughts, I reflected on the oft-repeated words of Mother Teresa who passed away last month, "The opposite of love is not hate, the opposite of love is indifference." [Editor's note: This quotation is actually attributed to Elie Wiesel.] Do you agree that this is so?

Not to feel anything in your heart, not to think as long as things are going well for you, means that you don't care about anyone else! Such a world is devoid of love. Such a world is terrifying!

A Personal View on the Down and Up Movement in Piano Playing and the Effect of Limited Concepts

by Huub de Leeuw

I was a newcomer in Matsumoto a long time ago and among the many things I learned from Kataoka Sensei, there was one I never would have guessed would become so important.

Kataoka Sensei's approach to the keyboard and focus on posture and sound production were totally new to me, and in the beginning I was constantly bewildered. My initial understanding of what I experienced developed quite unconsciously

and crystallized into concepts to be used for my own practice and as teaching ideas for the future.

As soon as I established such concepts, feeling I had developed a somewhat solid base of understanding, Kataoka Sensei would suddenly change the rules and change her approach to the keyboard in a very drastic way, leaving me and the other Teacher Trainees quite at a loss. Gone was our comfortable base. We had finally begun to

grasp something and then suddenly this! If this had happened only once I might even have forgotten about it, but it happened several times. Several times of total upheaval, Why?

Later I came to view what was happening in a



Practicing Down/Ups.

different way. I saw it more like we were being taught not to rely on fixed rules, but rather to understand the universal idea behind it all, and through that process become true teachers ourselves.

What was so annoying in the beginning opened my eyes over the years. Kataoka Sensei's own evolution was the result of her continuous research. Now it almost seems like a basic rule: we can only grasp an idea that we are ready to abandon. Once our concepts start to get fixed, time is ripe for change. This seems to be the only way to keep universal values alive and to become a worthwhile teacher ourselves. Though study with a Master Teacher is essential, mere copying will soon become a dead end street. Constant renewal from a deeply understood base is the only way to protect a tradition, in this case the teaching of Suzuki Piano Basics, from drying up.

I suppose that everyone who has come in contact with Suzuki Piano Basics will agree that teaching piano this way is about teaching piano playing without impediments, being physically free to produce beautiful tone and music. The teaching of the down and up movement in Suzuki Piano Basics teaching feels like a miraculous gateway to good playing in a technically musical way. Kataoka Sensei's down and up movements were done with such freedom of the body, resulting in such energetic and joyful sound.

Now when we ourselves give it a try, that essential idea, obtaining total freedom, can change into its opposite, resulting in control instead of freedom. This is a crucial difference. The more we may try to copy this beautiful feeling of freedom at the keyboard, studying from a limited concept, namely a vertical movement down and up with the arm, the more we may practice, the more frustrated we may be with the result. Though the down-up

movement is, by definition, a vertical movement, it is not at all vertical in its essence. The vertical motion represents full space, and though the arm is the tool, it not only represents the arm itself but in fact it represents the entire body. And since the mind moves body, the more the mind is focused solely on vertical arm movements, the more limited the resulting sound. The more the mind is part of all space, not only focusing on the actual impact with the piano key, the more open the sound will be.

I find that the sound of Kataoka Sensei's down and up movements relate to something a teacher of Alexander Technique once told me: "We cannot teach the body anything, we can only learn from it."

Kataoka Sensei practiced, besides playing the piano, a different kind of body/mind discipline, called Katsugen Undou. Katsugen Undou is a kind of mental/body practice which triggers the body to start moving from its own life force so to speak. The movements are spontaneous and, by definition, uncontrolled. One has to reach a certain state of mind in order to make these movements happen spontaneously. This practice has, no doubt, a tremendous effect when practicing an instrument like the piano. A keen awareness of mind and body in space seems to be the prerequisite for studying the down and up movements at the keyboard: the only way the mind and body can operate without

the limit of concepts to create a sound that is not only controlled, but free.

Teaching on two pianos allows us the wonderful advantage of being able to emerge from the limited space around our own instrument to include the space of the other instrument as well. This makes it easier to detach from our own keyboard and to project the sound.

I always notice that Teacher Trainees who are projecting for a student at the other piano play better than when they play for themselves. It is this projecting of the mind and the ear into space which moves the body in the right way. As I see it, connecting mind and body using space in order to get a free sound is what the down and up movement is all about.

When the down and up movements have become pure energy without obstruction, they become a joy to hear as well as to practice. They are so much more than a mere exercise. The main reason to teach or practice these movements is for the joy of the resulting freedom they give us.

Even the Twinkles remain fun and never become a chore when played with a fully internalized down/up feeling.

Unfortunately, we may have to struggle for quite a while before we can leave our struggle behind and find that kind of freedom.



Huub de Leeuw, Utrecht, Netherlands

What Should I Do Immediately After I Have Attended A Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop and Had A Lesson With One of the Japanese Teachers?

By Rita Burns

After 32 years of teaching Suzuki Piano Basics, the one element of teaching that I consider **the most important** is **how I demonstrate at the piano** for my students.

Of all the knowledge I accumulated from my degree in Music Education, including music theory, music history, spots to practice in the Suzuki repertoire, etc. none is as important as the sound I make and how I physically demonstrate that sound at the piano. Our playing has such a huge effect on our students. They copy everything we do, both our good habits and our bad habits. This is evident locally when we have recitals together. Even without seeing the teacher's name in the program, we all know who the teacher is when we see and hear a student play.

Therefore, I want to have the best possible demonstration for my students. The way I have chosen to do that is to have frequent lessons with one of the two Japanese teachers who have been traveling to the states for the last 11 years since Kataoka Sensei's death in 2004.

Linda Nakagawa bravely started the annual workshop and 10-Piano Concerts here in Sacramento and continues to bring the Japanese teachers here. I am very grateful to her for her



International Suzuki Piano Basics 10-Piano Concert, Matsumoto, April 2015. I to R: Ayase Takezawa and Mirei Takezawa, Japan, Renee Susanto, Orange County CA, and Sarah Schuette (Rita's student), Carmichael CA.



International Suzuki Piano Basics 10-Piano Concert, Sacramento, California 2014. L to R: Andrea Nguyen, Orange County, CA, Kate Schuette (Rita's student), Sarah Schuette, Carmichael CA, Mai Oguchi, Matsumoto,

courage to jump into the unknown and work like crazy to produce these workshops. She has given us all a gift which has developed into a cultural exchange with Japan.

Because I was 38 years old when I first attended a Suzuki workshop, like most of you I had already previously accumulated years of piano playing with traditional instruction. I had piano lessons from age eight through college. I became a great sight reader and knew a lot about composers, pieces, chord progressions, scales, etc. I even won piano scholarships in college, but I really did not play well and I knew it.

After I discovered the Suzuki Method at an MTAC meeting in Sacramento I began attending Suzuki Institutes at various colleges in California. The

instruction was not great and I was very confused about the method. I almost gave it up.

Then we teachers in Sacramento discovered Kataoka Sensei. Several of us attended a workshop with her in San Diego. I was still not grasping mentally what was going on, but my instinct told me it was good, and since I knew my own playing was not good I was desperate to improve. I loved that she referred to sound in her lessons and actually had detailed instructions about how to improve it. I was in love with this teacher and the with the process. Little did I know that I would be immersed in the same process 32 years hence.

Previously, I could play the notes, but the sound was “bangy” as my husband had told me after college recitals. He liked my singing better.

I now know that learning how to play the piano is a life’s journey. I am grateful for that. How boring it would be if I had somehow arrived at my destination in teaching and piano playing years ago. I doubt I would have continued teaching piano if I had not met Dr. Kataoka. I would have become a home decorator.

Because my first piano instruction did not deal with listening to sound and how to use my body at the piano, the accumulation of bad habits has been difficult to overcome these 32 years which leads me to my main point: the more workshops you attend and accumulate in your life the better teacher you will become. **But, just attending the workshops is not enough.** What do you do when you get home? How do you apply what you have learned from the workshop to your everyday teaching and playing? The goal is to improve, right?

If I were not convinced that the way I play directly effects the way my students play I probably would not continue going to workshops. But I am highly motivated to do for my students what I might not do for myself alone, and so I have come to realize that the workshop continues at home until I go to the next one.

The following are steps I take hopefully to improve my playing for the next lesson six months from now.

1. When attending the workshop, pay close attention to what is going on. Listen to the sound. Close your eyes so the sound surrounds you and so you can concentrate on it.
2. Open your eyes and watch what is going on. Watch the Japanese teacher’s demonstration. My daughter mentioned to me at this last workshop, “Ogiwara Sensei’s hands are the softest I have ever seen.” Look at their posture, see how they do not use extra motion to produce a sound. Take it all in. Try to get in touch with your senses of hearing, seeing, feeling. There is lots of repetition so it requires determination to stay focused. It is enjoyable to use your senses rather than just thinking and it is certainly less tiring.
3. Always have a lesson and make sure you come away with a video of it. Some workshops produce videos for you if you ask, but lately most of us have our own recording device.
4. When you get home watch your lesson. I stop at places and write down the key elements that I need to consider when practicing and place them on a sticky note on my piano until my next lesson in six months. I remind myself I only have six months hopefully to make this better.
5. Practice daily, thinking about what you have to do to change how you were playing at the lesson. You have to think when you practice. Listen to your own tone. Experiment with old ways of using your body and the new ways that the teacher has suggested. Is the tone different? Is it better or worse?

6. Practice exactly as the teacher has demonstrated in the video, slowly and one hand alone, then try it faster and see if the quality is better. Then try it hands together. It is beneficial to watch the video several times. You may miss something.
7. If possible, study with fellow teachers on a regular basis. Our habits are imbedded deep in our bodies, making it very difficult to be aware of what we are doing by ourselves. Tell your colleagues what you are trying to accomplish. Be as specific as possible. Piano is the study of details in sound and action. If you are new to Suzuki Piano Basics, seek out a more experienced teacher whose students you think play well and observe his/her lessons, and/or have regular lessons with that teacher.
8. When playing a piece use the same feeling in your hand and the same sound you have learned when playing the Twinkles. It is easy to go back to old habits when playing the pieces even though your Twinkles may be good.
9. Most important, because piano playing requires us to use the body, it takes time and repetition to improve. It is both humbling and rewarding. Be patient and don't give up. Trust the process. You will get better with time.



Rita Burns in her studio, Carmichael, California.

I commented to a fellow teacher after my last lesson this month that I will not live long enough to fix my own playing problems. We both laughed because we know that we are both in the same boat.

So, I am off to watch the video of the lesson and get started on yet another journey to get ready for the next lesson in February. What a privilege it is to be a piano teacher and to be on this journey.

By the way, I was really lucky to have many students have lessons and four of them play in the Friendship Concert at our workshop this year. These recitals, in particular, are the time for us teachers to learn as we observe our students perform and then as we hear the post-concert critique by the Japanese teachers. So take a student with you to your workshop to enhance your experience even further.

Hope to see you in February in Phoenix or Orange County or in August in Sacramento for the 10-Piano Concert.

Proposed Scholarship Program for Teachers

On Tuesday, October 27, The Board of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation held a meeting. The Scholarship program initiative, proposed by Rae Kate Shen, was discussed, and this tentative purpose statement drafted by Board member, Dr. Hannah Hall, who will become the Chair of the Scholarship Committee:

The Kataoka Research Scholarship will further the legacy established by Dr. Kataoka, making it possible to raise up the next generation of Suzuki Piano Basics teachers. This scholarship will be awarded to rising teachers who are members of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation, and who require financial assistance in order to attend events featuring Senseis Ogiwara and Kawamura from Japan. Those who are new to teaching Piano Basics philosophy may apply to attend a research workshop or 10-Piano Concert held in the United States. Established teachers, who possess great future potential and earnestly seek to develop their skills, may apply for funding to attend 10-Piano Concerts and/or extended study in Japan.

The Scholarship Program is projected to begin for events scheduled in 2017. All applications for 2017 events will be due by September 1, 2016. Please contact Hannah Hall <correctthecause@gmail.com> for application materials and details that will be formulated in the coming months. The ability of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation to provide funds for teacher research will depend on the success of the Scholarship Committee's various fund-raising activities. We encourage teachers to donate to the Scholarship Fund that Rae Kate Shen generously initiated in August 2015. Donations, clearly marked Scholarship Fund, may be sent to our Treasurer, Linda Nakagawa, 242 River Acres Road, Sacramento CA 95831.

Piano Basics Foundation Upcoming Workshops/Events

November 6-9, 2015

Atlanta, Georgia

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop
with Bruce Anderson
Contact Kathie Sheeley 404-384-5650
kathiesheeley@icloud.com

February 11-15, 2016

Orange County, California

Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop
with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura
Contact Mei Ihara 714-997-8692
mihara14@att.net

February 3-7, 2016

Phoenix, Arizona

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

***Please note: this workshop was
inadvertently omitted from listing
In the previous hardcopy newsletter.***

June 20-24, 2016

Maumelle, Arkansas

Suzuki Piano Basics Festival
Five Piano and Chamber Music
with Rita Burns, Rae Kate Shen
and Michael Jacobsen
Contact Pam Werner 501-425-2862
musicpam@gmail.com

July 30-August 14, 2016

Sacramento, California

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



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 Web Site and discussion group:

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