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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: June 15, 2016**

*Nature*  
*versus*  
*Convenience*  
*Which One is Important?*

**By Haruko Kataoka**

**From the Matsumoto Suzuki Piano Newsletter  
Vol. 7 No 6, November 8, 1997  
Translated by Chisa Aoki and  
Teri Paradero  
Edited by Karen Hagberg**

It has been close to forty years (1955) since I moved to Matsumoto. There has been so much to ponder while studying with Shinichi Suzuki Sensei and learning about the Suzuki Method, a pedagogy so different from the music education to which I was accustomed.

It has recently occurred to me that many more people study the piano than other musical instruments. Japan, Europe, and the United States all have very excellent music schools. It should follow that there would be many outstanding piano students who are expending great effort. In addition, many books on piano technique have been published and are widely available. Even though we are surrounded by people who can play accurately without making mistakes, it seems recently that there are no pianists we regard as masters.

Considering the whole world, pianists of a high caliber can be counted on our ten fingers. No matter how you look at it, there are too few. In the beginning of this century, there were more piano virtuosos (Rachmaninoff, Hoffman, Pachmann, Schnabel, Landowska, Cortot, Backhaus, Giesecking, Haskil, Serkin, Horowitz, Gould, Rubenstein, Kempff, Gulda, etc). This is not only true with piano. I feel that there were many more masters in

all areas of music. What can be the reason that we had numerous masters in the past compared with so few today?

As we headed into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, we advanced toward a 'material' civilization. After Japan was defeated in World War II, before we knew it everything had become unimaginably convenient due to Japan's successful economic growth. Embracing each and every convenience along the way, could it be that we are losing something in the process? I feel that these conveniences are problematic.

Travelling on the super express train or driving highly efficient, fast cars on highways delivers us easily to our destinations. However, we are losing the opportunity to use our legs to walk. We are losing the opportunity to observe all the things that we can see only while walking.

Schools have become splendid. Not only do they teach the basic reading and writing skills that were staples for temple elementary schools in the past, many subjects are covered so much so that schools have become a convenience for parents. Still not Originally, human beings thrived in this vast, beautiful Earth. We are happiest when we live within this natural world. We can study and work in a natural state releasing unnecessary tension in our shoulders, always breathing calmly, without hurry, without being frantic, feeling expansive like the spacious blue sky. This natural state makes it possible to discover how to study in the best way and to be able to determine and find the best vocation that suits us so we can become a masterful expert in our field.

Human beings have forgotten our heart and soul with so much focus on materialism in our modern day world. It has robbed us of our nature, our humanity. This is truly regrettable for our children.

When it comes to the piano, what is important is not music theory or knowledge about music. To

satisfied with schools, parents insist on more studying so now "cram schools" (supplementary after-school programs) have become popular.

Something similar has happened to our food. All you have to do is add hot water or warm food in a microwave. These kinds of convenient products line the super market shelves. You don't have to wash or cut anything; menu combos come already put together. Have humans become lazy these days? Are they so busy? It really makes me wonder. Children have lost the opportunity to enjoy a home cooked meal made by the mother whose time and effort is filled with heartfelt love.

I can't help but wonder that food so convenient might have unnatural ingredients in it. Perhaps there is a spy in our midst hoping to sabotage the welfare of the Japanese people.

There are so many other issues, but I have only covered three scenarios. Even with just these examples, what is to happen to the human body exposed to such conveniences that we would forsake nature and our freedom?

play the piano, the natural state of the body must be achieved with no tension or stiffness in the body. We must teach how to play the piano so that ease in playing coincides with the pleasure of music.

When it comes to the natural state of the body, it can only be accomplished by the diligent care and attention given with love, day-to-day, by the surrounding environment of people present in the lives of children.

While flowing in this tremendous current of our 20<sup>th</sup> Century materialistic culture, it is probably not possible for a single individual to escape this torrent regardless of how great the effort. Still, instead of vacuously riding the current, I would like to put forth the effort to regain what convenience has taken away no matter how small the outcome.

# ***Kataoka Research Scholarship Update/Reminder***

The Scholarship Committee is being formed. Please notify the Chair, Hannah Hall [correctthecause@gmail.com](mailto:correctthecause@gmail.com) if you wish to serve on it.

Scholarship applications are being received until the deadline, September 1, 2016 for all 2017 events. This scholarship is for teachers wanting to pursue continuing education with the teachers from Japan. Contact Hannah Hall for information.

In order for this program to be viable, we encourage our members to contribute to the Scholarship Fund. Your contribution may be sent to Treasurer Linda Nakagawa, 242 River Acres Drive, Sacramento, California 95831. Thank you!

## ***The Miracle of Book 1***

***By Devrey Cunningham***

Working with Book 1 students for the past three years has changed my life. This realization did not occur to me until recently, when I was feeling frustrated one day because I did not have time to practice advanced pieces such as the ones I used to play for college recitals. I run a studio with 30 piano students (most of them in Book 1), I work part-time teaching music at a local elementary school, and I have two young children under the age of eight, so there is very little time to practice advanced pieces.

To tell you how studying Book 1 almost exclusively for three years has blessed my life, let me start from the beginning: I grew up with traditional piano lessons, and it was not until I went back to school to study music, was married, and had one child that I met a Suzuki teacher. This teacher helped get me in contact with Linda Nakagawa in Sacramento. My husband and I were studying at UC Davis at the time, and I wondered at first if learning a new method of playing the piano was worth the half-hour commute each week. *It was!* Linda told me to read Dr. Kataoka's books on piano technique and how to teach beginners, and she began training me in the Suzuki Piano Basics Method.

I was overwhelmed and in awe of this new way to play piano. It felt strange and yet natural. It was difficult at first but became easy. I went to my first workshop with the Japanese teachers in Sacramento and could hear *such* a difference in sound, and I saw young students playing difficult

pieces with ease. I knew that this method was special.

As I have continued attending the workshops, as I have also been trying to teach beginning students of my own, I have realized more and more that this natural way of playing the piano makes better musicians. Children learn to love music and their good sound. They are nurtured and loved by their teachers. They get a solid foundation in technique that helps them later on when they get to advanced and technically challenging pieces. This is where I have learned that Book 1 has changed the way I play the piano.

There I was a few months ago feeling frustrated at my lack of having time to practice and play advanced pieces, when I did not realize that having beginning students and playing Book 1 for a few years greatly improved the way I play the piano. That day I was feeling frustrated, I had finally gotten some time to practice. The piece was a Beethoven Sonata that I had played in a college recital. I remember back when I was first learning it how difficult it had been to play some of the sixteenth- and thirty-second-note runs and how I had practiced and practiced for hours and hours and never seemed to get any better.

Although I had to take a little time to remember the notes, I was *amazed* that I could play the difficult runs with ease. Never in my life had I imagined that my fingers could fly so fast and easily between the

black and white keys. I sat there and wondered for a moment: I couldn't even play it this well in college when I was practicing for hours each day. I have been stuck playing Book 1 with my students for three years. How could this be?

Then I remembered Dr. Kataoka's writing about the importance of Book 1. It is the entire foundation of

correct technique and musicianship. I had not suffered in the least from spending these years teaching and playing Book 1. I had improved beyond what I had thought possible. Never again will I undervalue the time spent in Book 1.



Devrey Cunningham.

## ***Everyone needs good coaching***

***By Linda Nakagawa***

As a music student studying piano, I did not enjoy listening to piano music. I did listen to many piano recordings however, because piano was my major instrument. I loved listening to symphonies, concertos and even chamber music. Whenever the piano professors performed, it was often a mediocre performance. (Understandably, they were teachers, *not* performers.) However, they always complained about the piano for one reason or another. The blame always went on the piano. The piano was never good enough.

On the other hand, when I attended live concerts and recitals by Rubenstein, Horowitz, Gina Bachauer, Alicia de Larrocha, and other world-class pianists, I enjoyed listening to their piano sound. They played so effortlessly, and the sound was so magnificently beautiful. I often wondered if there was a way to make the piano sound good. I vividly remember a string professor saying as I

accompanied his student, "Yes, unfortunately the piano can't shape the tone on one note." I thought, yes, he is right. Pianists are at the mercy of the piano. Then I met Dr. Haruko Kataoka.

For about 20 years I studied with Kataoka Sensei, taking lessons and observing her teaching here in the states and in Matsumoto. There were many times I was clueless about what I was supposed to be hearing. In my early years of study, I often went with a friend who played the flute. It was almost comical because when Kataoka Sensei would demonstrate, my friend would be mesmerized by the sound. I often wondered what she heard. Finally after a while, my ears began to hear the musical tone from the piano. Yes, indeed, I began to discover that the piano can make a beautiful tone!

I desperately want my students to be able to hear and produce a beautiful sound from any piano. I

want them to be able to identify a good sound and not just to be fascinated by the many notes a pianist can play or the composer has written. It has been over 10 years since Sensei's passing. She constantly lectured that all the Basics of piano playing are in Book 1. If teachers would study and learn how to teach Book 1 correctly, our students would totally benefit. It is not as simple as it sounds, because in Book 1 we teachers must teach by demonstration alone, not by words.

There is no end to improving one's ability to play a beautiful tone. That is art. While I observed Kataoka Sensei teach lessons, I often wondered what she heard that I couldn't hear. I firmly believe that her ears were way better than mine because she was able to produce a much more beautiful tone than I could. I feel the same way when I observe Ogiwara Sensei and Kawamura Sensei. They studied with Kataoka Sensei many times each week and even grew up taking lessons with her. They

know more than even they realize. We have much to learn from them.

When I observe the 10-piano rehearsals in Matsumoto, I am so envious because the Japanese teachers participate in the program. I have wanted that for our 10-piano concert many times! It breaks my heart, but I finally realize that it is an impossible task. Our ability is not developed enough. Even though we may have studied more than once a year with Kataoka Sensei and now with her successors, this amount of study is totally different from every week. Just think what a difficult task it would be to teach our students only just once a month.

Even though I have a heavy heart, all is not lost. We can still work to become better teachers for our students if we practice and continue to take lessons and observe our mentors from Japan. Everyone needs good coaching!



Linda Nakagawa working with her student, Leila Abay.  
Photo by Jade Abay

***Suzuki Piano Basics International 10-Piano Concert  
Sacramento Convention Center  
Sunday, August 14, 2 p.m.***

**PROGRAM:**

1. Minuet for 4 hands  
Eine Kleine Nachtmusic, K. 525
2. The Bow
3. Twinkles A and D
4. Chant Arabe
5. Allegro
6. Ecossaise
7. The Happy Farmer
8. Minuet 2
9. Sonatina, Romance
10. Sonatina, Op. 36 No. 1 –Allegro
11. Sonatina, Op. 55 No. 1 –Allegro
12. Two Minuets –from Partita No. 1 in Bb Major
13. Gigue –from Partita No. 1 in Bb Major
14. Für Elise
15. Sonata in C Major K. 545 –Andante
16. Rondo Alla Turca
17. Fire Dance
18. Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 arranged for two pianos

It is easy for students to learn to play the notes on the piano. Being brought up through the Suzuki Piano Basics Method, they memorize very quickly. More difficult is learning to use their bodies more naturally so they can produce beautiful tone. We know that the students learn everything from their teacher, good and bad. That is why we teachers continually attend Piano Basics workshops to take lessons and to learn from each other.

With the best of our ability, we prepare our students for the 10-Piano Concert rehearsals. It is fascinating to see how the pieces are practiced from Book 1 throughout the advanced level. So much is learned by observing the students. We can see what has been taught thoroughly and what has not. It's a wonderful learning situation. It's a humbling experience which feeds the passion to become better.

Please contact Linda Nakagawa for registration details and full schedule [g.nakagawa@comcast.net](mailto:g.nakagawa@comcast.net).

Come and join us!



## ***General Membership Meeting 2016***

Our General Membership Meeting will be held in Sacramento in August during the 10-Piano Concert rehearsals, exact time and place to be determined. Please contact Renee Eckis [reneeekis@gmail.com](mailto:reneeekis@gmail.com) for details and to suggest agenda items.

The Nominations Chair and SPBF Board present this roster of Officers for the upcoming year:

President: Renee Eckis  
Secretary: Rae Kate Shen  
Treasurer: Linda Nakagawa

If you would like to serve the Foundation as Vice President, or to nominate someone for that position, please contact our Nominations Chairperson Ann Taylor [ann@anntaylorstudio.net](mailto:ann@anntaylorstudio.net).

### ***Note from the President:***

It has been my honor and privilege to serve as President of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation since its inception over 20 years ago. During that time, I am happy to say that our mission to preserve and promote the teachings of Dr. Haruko Kataoka has been our guiding principle.

We have made it possible for those teachers who want to educate themselves in the Suzuki Piano Basics Method to communicate with one another and to be informed of events featuring the teachers from Japan who grew up with Dr. Kataoka. We have perpetuated the international teacher/student exchange that Dr. Kataoka began with 10-Piano Concerts. We have resisted constant pressure from the community at large to replace the important foundation principles of this method with more traditional approaches.

Some will say that we have been too resistant to change. Those of us who have continued serious study with Ogiwara Sensei and Kawamura Sensei know that this method is, and always has been, dynamic and always evolving, owing to the intense research that teachers in Japan and many teachers here in the United States and Canada conduct on a regular basis. Dr. Kataoka taught us to pursue this research. Ours is the kind of study that brings us always deeper and keeps us from spreading out over our surface.

your understanding of this Method. I invite and encourage new teachers to take the time and effort to find out what Suzuki Piano Basics Method represents. It is not learned in one or even in several workshops. It is a lifetime study I will continue as Chair of the Board of the Foundation until my term expires in 2018 and as Newsletter Editor. In those capacities, I intend to continue to direct my energies to promote the mission that is and has been the sole purpose of this organization. Heartfelt thanks to all who have supported me in this effort.

Karen Hagberg

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# ***Piano Basics Foundation Upcoming Workshops/Events***

**June 20-24, 2016**

## **Louisville, Kentucky**

Louisville Suzuki Piano Basics Institute  
with Bruce Anderson, Karmalita Bawar  
and Rae Kate Shen

Contact Bruce Boiney 502-241-5921

[boiney@suzukipiano.com](mailto:boiney@suzukipiano.com)

[www.suzukipiano.org](http://www.suzukipiano.org)

**July 15-18, 2016**

## **Tacoma, Washington**

Suzuki Piano Basics Festival  
with Cathy Hargrave

Contact: Jacki Block 253-759-7213

[jblock@ups.edu](mailto:jblock@ups.edu)

**July 30-August 14, 2016**

## **Sacramento, California**

Suzuki Piano Basics International 10-Piano Concert

Contact Linda Nakagawa, 916-422-2952

[g.nakagawa@comcast.net](mailto: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](mailto:kh@hagbergsuzuki.com), 585-978-0600).

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

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