

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

The First Experience Is the Most Important in Everything!

By Haruko Kataoka

From the Matsumoto Suzuki Piano Newsletter
Vol. 6 No. 5, October 28, 1996
Translated by Chisa Aoki and
Teri Paradero
Edited by Karen Hagberg

Piano Basics Foundation News

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In the last issue I wrote about the importance of the beginning steps in the study of piano. This not only applies to piano: the beginning is most important no matter what area of study.

There was a wonderful art teacher at our Matsumoto Music Institute. Her name is Michiko Tsukikusa. She was inspired by Dr. Suzuki's Method of upbringing and nurturing children. She taught art here at the music school. My children both attended her classes since they were two years old.

She taught us that when children first begin to draw, they must use water colors and a paint brush rather than pencils and coloring pencils which are too hard. She taught us to have our children use pastel crayons at home because they are soft.

We, the parents, were discouraged from drawing identifiable things for the children. For example, drawing something and telling them, "This is a car" or "This is a flower" or "This is a house", etc. Coloring books were also discouraged because the ready-made pictures would make the children lose interest in the creative urge to draw original pictures of their own imagination. I made certain to follow her directions.

When I think about it now, the importance of how you begin is exactly the same with piano technique. If, from the beginning, you learn to play the piano with stiff fingers and make a hard sound, the body, hands and arms, memorize the impact between the keys and stiff hand. As a result, it becomes difficult to relax the tension in the fingers, and therefore one becomes unable to use the fingers in a soft, flexible way like a paint brush to produce good sound that is musical.

It is probably the same with drawing. If children initially experience drawing with a paint brush, they will be able to express in their drawing what they intend to convey as they see it or feel it.

Another thing occurred to me. It is about our daily handwriting, our penmanship. I often receive letters and postcards from my students. When compared to correspondence from olden days, handwriting on the average looks pretty much the same from person to person even when they are putting forth the effort to write their messages with care. I have the impression that people in the old days had great penmanship that showed different individual qualities.

My mother wrote her letters with smooth ease with an ink brush on rolled letter paper. I remember thinking as I watched her writing that when you become an adult everyone automatically can write with great ease and grace as she did. (I have been waiting but it seems like forever and it hasn't happened yet!)

I have a feeling that there are not many people in our generation who have good handwriting. We can assume that people from the Meiji Era (1868-1912) and Edo Era (1603-1868) used an ink brush when they first began to write. Because we used a pencil or a ballpoint pen when we first started writing, is it not likely that we are unable to write fluidly and gracefully with a touch that displays individual flare?

One of our teachers had an 'aha' moment regarding this issue. During the war, she attended a school during her time of evacuation. They had no pencils or paper. As a result, they used construction nails to write on the schoolyard ground. It was a revelation for her that explains why she cannot write well. This conclusion is really a distinct possibility.

From birth to toddlerhood, human beings are soft and relaxed physically and emotionally and everything they learn at this point in their lives is a first in their experience. I feel that everything they are provided from this stage in life is repeated and become abilities. As they approach adulthood, they are powered by these abilities throughout their lives.

I plead with those of us who teach children. Please don't teach 'by the book' or simply follow a manual, instead research and by the repeated process of trial and error, teach children the most important first experience with great care.

Let's Learn Piano!

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Teri Paradero
Edited by Karen Hagberg

I have a student who was born in January and turns three this year. She has been practicing for six months.

The first month she practiced facing the teacher and bowing. When asked, "Put your feet together and stand tall," she tried very hard to keep her feet together and stand.

When she was able to bow properly, then it was time to sit on the chair and learn to get ready with her thumb over the piano key. By doing this she was practicing concentration. At first, holding ready position for three-seconds was a stretch, but toward the end of two months, she was able to be ready for ten seconds.

While we worked on ready position, we started counting finger numbers on the right hand. Finger 1 is the thumb, 2 is the pointer finger, 3 is the middle finger, 4 is the ring finger and 5 is the pinky. After practicing finger numbers diligently at home, by September she was able to count from one to five consecutively although counting backwards from five to one was not easy. She definitely knows fingers 1 and 5, but still is not clear about the 3 middle

fingers. Progress is of course different from child to child, but at age three children fluctuate from being able to do it one day and then back to not being able to do it the next day. However, all of a sudden by age four, everything improves.

So this little student's father said something very interesting in October. He observed, "She has become quite smart lately since she started piano." He continued, "Dexterity in her fingers has improved so much that she is able to fold small origami very well, something she couldn't do before. She is now starting to count things. She can also manage the use two different clicks when using the computer's mouse."

Although I am the one teaching piano and would be aware of changes, I was surprised and full of awe. Does learning piano really result in being able to do so many good things?

I was aware for quite a long while that there is scientific evidence that movement or the use of fingers improves intelligence. I have also been saying that education should start when children are young and the earlier the better. Still, it is astonishing to hear such an observation by a father whose experience is still limited since it has not been so long that his daughter started piano.

So everyone, please encourage parents to start their young children with piano lessons if they are thinking about their children's future.

So Few Places to Learn These Values

Speech delivered by Ann Taylor at banquet following the Suzuki Piano Basics International 10-Piano Concert, Sacramento, California, August 14, 2016

I would like to express my admiration and awe for Ogiwara Sensei, Kawamura Sensei and Nozawa Sensei. There is no way to say emphatically enough that the work they do with our students is amazing: their energy and dedication always makes me determined to try harder with my own students. I think I have come to six or seven of the 10-Piano Concerts by now, and I know that, by participating, I grow every time.

My students in Arizona cannot come because school begins on August 1, and missing the first two weeks of school simply does not work.



Ann Taylor and her granddaughter, Kelly Domashinski, backstage. Photo by Margaret Domashinski.

However, they all are very supportive of my attendance, and many would really like to come. This year I was fortunate enough to have my granddaughter attend. She lives in Connecticut.

I won't preach to the choir. Those of you here know how much improvement there is over the several weeks, how much students learn about practice and performance preparation that changes their playing forever, and the cherished friendships that develop.

I guess the most important point I want to make in these remarks is that there are so few places in this country to learn the values that Suzuki Method teaches: focus/attention to the smallest of things so the big ones will work out; hard work counts! Done with love. It's magic, only it's not. I tell my families that Day 1 sounds good, but that the level they see on the final DVD is not luck or magic. It is hard work. Each rehearsal moves the piece along a lot, but it is hard work by homestay families, parents, students and Sensei and all the Basics teachers who have put in so much time and planning for each little detail that make it really seem magical.

While we are such a miniscule part of this Earth, I think the lessons the students receive in the development of their personhood and the beauty of the music they present touch us all, and are positives in a world that often seems so full of negatives. It speaks volumes of the vision of Dr. Suzuki and Dr. Kataoka to fill hearts and minds with music. Life is hard. Work hard with Love!

Many more thanks to Sensei, Linda Nakagawa, and all the teachers and all the parents and homestay families and students who have worked so hard. Thanks again and again.

Announcing: First Recipient of Kataoka Research Scholarship

It is with great pleasure I, with other Scholarship Committee members Ann Taylor and Ben Smith, announce the winner of the Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation 2016-2017 Kataoka Research Scholarship. Christine Darling, of San Diego, California, will be awarded full tuition to attend one of the February 2017 workshops, featuring Sensei Ogiwara and Kawamura. Congratulations to Christine.



Christine Darling, San Diego, California.

We look forward to hearing about her experience.

Christine Darling has been teaching Suzuki Piano Basics for over ten years. She began attending Suzuki workshops while in college and completed units 1-3 SAA teacher training. She received her Masters Degree from Southern Methodist University, Meadows School of the Arts and simultaneously studied with teacher trainer Cathy Hargrave for two years. Christine currently lives in San Diego, CA with her husband, Nick, daughter Lucy, and two cats, Poe and Emerson. She has 25 students in her studio in Point Loma. She is currently on maternity leave until January 2017 and is enjoying this special time with Lucy. She will bring a student to Orange County to have a lesson and perform in the Friendship Concert.

Hannah Hall, Chair
Scholarship Commi

Teachers/Parents

PLEASE READ ON. We know you have thought about packing up and sending in your Kataoka videos to be preserved for future study, but you just have not gotten around to it yet. Now is the time to clear out that bookcase or the corner of your attic/garage/basement. Your videos are decomposing every day, even those on DVD. The only way to save and preserve this archive is to have them digitalized.

Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation is deeply grateful to Professor Kenneth Wilburn at East Carolina University who has been digitalizing our videos at *no cost* to us. This is an incredible gift to the history of Suzuki Piano Method, as the digitalization process can be extremely costly.

So we implore our members 1) to view the Archive as it now stands, greatly improved from earlier versions (to view Archive, send an email request to Dr. Wilburn wilburnk@ecu.edu) and 2) to send in your videos! (Identify place and date as much as possible. Students will not be identified, and teacher lessons will not be included in the Archive.) Videos in any and all formats may be included and will be preserved. **THANK YOU.**

Send videos to:

Professor Kenneth Wilburn
History Department, Brewster A318
East Carolina University
East Fifth Street 5
Greenville, North Carolina 27858-4353

Using Twinkles and Down/Ups to Full Advantage

By Teri Paradero

Over the past twenty-one years, I have had the privilege of being the interpreter at most of the workshops and 10-Piano Concerts I have attended, first for Dr. Kataoka and more recently for Ogiwara Sensei and Kawamura Sensei. For a long time now I have noticed at these events that advanced students often cannot do Twinkles and Down/Ups very well when asked to use them in their practice. Their bodies are not natural and balanced, and their sound is not a musical sound. How can this be, when Dr. Kataoka taught us that these exercises form the Basics of piano technique? How good can an advanced piece be if the performer cannot execute good Twinkles?

Some time ago I resolved to have students who would maintain the ability to do these exercises at every level of their study. What I discovered was that this takes an enormous commitment and great effort on the part of the teacher, student, and parent, but that the results are well worth it.

Dr. Kataoka always emphasized the importance of good posture and body balance, things that become possible only with correct seating. At the beginning of Book I, we spend a great deal of time assessing a student's optimal chair and footrest height, the distance of the chair from the piano, and the amount of the body in

contact with the chair. We teach a good ready position, with the arm held away from the body supporting a relaxed hand and wrist, no tension in shoulders. We begin teaching the Twinkle A rhythm, listening for good sound, moving the fingertips naturally, moving to a ready position with the whole hand over each finger one at a time. There is so much to teach in the Twinkles. It takes a long time for a student to be able to play the rhythms accurately with consistent musical tone while maintaining a natural and balanced body. Dr. Kataoka always said that the Twinkles are at the beginning of Book 1 not because they are easy, but because they need to be taught first and constantly improved as the student learns the rest of the Book. This applies to the left hand as well as the right hand.

What I have discovered as I pursued my goal is that students need to be assessed at every lesson as if it were their first lesson. There is no better way to do this than to hear them play Twinkles (and then Down/Ups after these are introduced at the end of Book 1). Before hearing the exercises, the seating and the ready position needs to be assessed, always instructing the parents to be aware of changes the students will experience as their bodies grow.

Do you have students who could hold their arms up last week and then come in seemingly unable to do it this week? Or, another very telling clue, does their shoulder go up at ready position? I find this happens often, and that it is important not to attribute this to any failing of the student because it happens naturally as they grow. Most mothers, having experienced pregnancy, can understand the physical disorientation that happens when there is profound change in the body. Children experience this almost constantly. If a student cannot sit well this week, I explain to the parent that the body needs to be re-educated as it changes and that this is a natural issue that all students experience. The students

love it when I exclaim, “Oh I see you grew!” when they hike up their shoulder or drop their elbow instead of berating them for being unable to do something they could do last week. Their inability becomes a celebration of their growing up.

This weekly assessment takes time, patience, and persistence. By doing it, the parent becomes increasingly more able to help the child at home, the child develops patience for the necessary repetition required for good practice, and the Basics of piano technique are reinforced and developed over time rather than weakened by shifting attention to increasingly difficult repertoire.

In addition to practicing the Twinkles as written, I have begun to ask for black-key Twinkles as well (key of C#). I find that the movement of the fingertips is necessarily more controlled and precise on the black keys, and that if students are asked to play the white keys using the same fingertip motion as they did on the black keys they understand how to eliminate wasted movement and the resulting imprecise sound. Working on the black keys helps to relax the palm, because playing with stiff fingers and hand causes loss of balance, making it hard to stay on the black keys. In order to keep from falling off the black keys, one must play with a relaxed palm and good balance.

After learning Down/Ups when they start the left-hand accompaniment of Allegro, students continue Down/Up

practice on the Twinkle melody in each hand.

This is the routine I am using presently at the beginning of every lesson:

- While learning the right hand of the pieces in Book 1, all the Twinkles in each hand.
- When beginning to learn left-hand accompaniments, add black-key Twinkle A, playing it first and then asking for same finger movements on the white key Twinkles A-D, both right-hand and left-hand.
- In Book 2 and above, begin with Down/Ups in each hand, then black-key Twinkle A, white-key Twinkle A with regular fingering, white-key Twinkle A with all thumb, and white-key Twinkle A with all 5th finger. Students who are accustomed to this routine, and who can get into good ready position with cues with which they have become very familiar, can finish this exercise in around nine minutes.
- I am also experimenting with Twinkle D and Down/Ups on the black keys, always having the students go back and forth from black keys to white (or white keys to black) with the same exercise so they can feel what they have to learn from moving from one to the other. Students can appreciate comparisons to be made regarding the relaxed movement of the fingertips in relationship to the wrist or the arm, or elbow supporting the hand and fingers. Most important is that they notice that there is no difference when going from white key to black or black key to white.

Carrying out this routine was most difficult in the beginning when my more advanced students were not accustomed to it, but now that they know exactly how each lesson will begin they have developed the patience to do it. I assign them the same routine at home. I know not all of them do it at home on a daily basis or at all, but there is great value in doing it at least once a week at their lesson, while their seating equipment and their body balance are being evaluated.

I can say this: my students' ability to perform the Twinkles and Down/Ups no longer dissipates as they become more advanced. In fact, it improves. With good attention to these Basics, how can it not?



Teri Paradero doing Down/Ups with student, Nolan Condon.
Photo by Kim Condon.

To Our Members

All membership in Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation is for a calendar year. Therefore, now is the time for *all* of us to renew our membership.

Dues for the calendar year 2017 are due and payable between now and February 15, 2017. Members whose dues are not received by March 15 will not appear in our 2017 Directory. The fee for teacher members is \$40, and family membership is \$25. **We encourage all teachers to require family membership in your studio so that we may continue to relieve workshop directors from airfare fluctuations when we invite teachers from Japan.**

As usual, we do not routinely send out separate bills to individuals, trusting our members to renew in time to appear in our annual directory. Please send checks (we do not accept credit-card payments) payable to Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation, to Linda Nakagawa, Treasurer, 242 River Acres Drive, Sacramento, CA 95831. Thank you for all your continued support!

Piano Basics Foundation

Upcoming Workshops/Events

February 2-6, 2017

Louisville, Kentucky

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshops
with Keiko Kawamura and Keiko Ogiwara
Contact Bruce Boiney 502-241-5921
boiney@suzukipiano.com

February 9-13, 2017

Orange County, California

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

April 30, 2017

Matsumoto, Japan

Suzuki Piano Basics International 10-Piano Concert
Contact Karen Hagberg, 585-978-0600
kh@hagbergsuzuki.com

Deadlines: For teachers without students: 11/30/16

**PLEASE NOTE: AUGUST WORKSHOP DATES ARE REVISED
FROM THOSE PRINTED IN PREVIOUS NEWSLETTER**

August 3-7, 2017

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Suzuki Piano Basics International Teacher Training Workshop
with Keiko Kawamura and Keiko Ogiwara
Contact in Philadelphia: Janet Kaido 267-251-0429
janet@alumni.curtis.edu

August 10-14, 2017

Sacramento, California

Suzuki Piano Basics International Teacher Training Workshop
with Keiko Kawamura and Keiko Ogiwara
Contact in Sacramento: 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>