

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

Striving for First Class

By Haruko Kataoka

With comments by Matsumoto Teachers

From the Matsumoto Suzuki Piano Newsletter
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No matter what one studies, in the beginning we all start at ground zero. There is no knowledge, no ability; we are like blank paper.

Conventional wisdom dictates that we start out being inept, and then we gradually become proficient. Children cannot be expected in the beginning to be skilled at any task. Meanwhile, in time they become advanced and, if they study hard with a good teacher, they can master a skill. This is the conventional way people think. However, it is this very way of thinking where mistakes originate.

At the outset, it is important to determine whether we aim to be first class or third class. For instance, in piano, the performance of Book 1 pieces must be first class, as should the pieces in Book 2. After not studying first class at the outset, we cannot expect to become first class at the advanced level.

The issue at hand is the teacher. The children and parents who come to learn are not experts. They are not able to assess the quality of the lesson they are receiving. By and by, the child becomes advanced. If there should come a time when a child decides that he/she wants to study music and aspires to study at the best music conservatory, it is too late to bring a mediocre education or ability up to the required standard.

Discovering at the last minute that his or her piano study had been inferior to the point that it was impossible to matriculate into a good conservatory would be a terrible shock for any student. It is a pitiful situation. The American educator Dr. William Smith Clark said to his students in Japan, "Boys, be ambitious," but I believe that it is the teachers who need always to study what is first class and to strive to teach it.

If only those individuals who received first-class education in the arena of politics, economics, music, etc, were to be in charge of their respective fields I think that our world would be a wonderful place. In order for human beings to learn what is first class, it is necessary for those of us who teach to have the warmth of love, patience and perseverance. This is not something that can be accomplished by the kind of last-minute cramming that Japanese students do in preparation for their college entrance examinations.

A while ago, I remember listening to a news telecast of a debate between a Japanese college professor and an American politician about the problems of politics in Washington. Their conclusion was that Japan has a first-class economy, but third-class politicians. Conversely, the United States has a third-class economy with first-class politicians. They theorized that a third-class economy could be changed into a first-class one, but that it might impossible to change human beings. This discussion made me laugh. To change politicians, who are already adults, realistically would be truly improbable.

First-class learning must start from the beginning. Traditional thinking would have us believe that merely learning the notes of a piece and then moving on to the next piece is sufficient education. On the contrary, the teacher must always carefully teach each piece starting with the Twinkles so while taking into consideration the students' present capability, they can perform at their best, highest level.

Parents/guardians, we exert much effort toward this goal of nurturing the ability to study at the very highest level. Let us please cooperate together to provide the very best, first-class study for our children.

When Dr. Kataoka spoke to us, she referred to this concept of 'first class' over and over. What are the concrete

ways we can strive for first-class education?

Because we study music, we should attend concerts of world-renowned virtuosi. It is also a must to listen daily to recordings of the best pianists. What about arts other than music? For instance, in the visual arts, you can experience calligraphy, painting, ceramics, or a wonderfully made movie. You can also observe the very best in sports like baseball or soccer. Items that we use daily should be of good quality. Meals can be economical, but extra care and effort can be taken in their preparation. There are many areas in life that you can exemplify 'first class.' The concept of 'first class' can

apply not only to objects or things. It is relevant also in social interactions where the ability to address or greet people properly is crucial, as is one's training in proper etiquette and manners. We must never forget to teach the ability to aspire to polish one movement to the highest degree.

We, as adults, must keep in mind that we must strive to provide opportunities for our children to experience and to be influenced by what is genuine and real.

From the Editor:

Dear Members,

Here we are in the New Year! It is still mid-winter, however, and the pandemic still rages all over the country. Who knew, last March, that we would be having to deal with this for so long? Who knows how much longer it will be affecting the fabric of our daily lives?

I continue to receive uplifting reports from teachers who have met the challenge of the Covid-19 virus head-on. Our Covid Snapshots feature in this issue highlights an outdoor Christmas concert planned by parents in Atlanta and a virtual teacher training workshop organized by teachers in Philadelphia. What are you, your students, and your parents doing to adjust to this new normal? It is more important than ever that we are able to share our ideas and solutions with each other in these pages, so I encourage each and every one of you to send reports of your experiences. Students and

parents are especially invited to share, so teachers, please make sure they are invited to make contributions. All materials, writings and visuals, may be sent to me by email at khagberg1943@gmail.com. Next deadline is February 20.

We all hope that the need for our Covid Snapshots feature will wane in the coming months. Meanwhile, we are all under the stresses of the pandemic. We are concerned about the children growing up in these strange and frightening times. Whatever relief we may provide them will be remembered throughout their lives. Whatever normalcy we can create will be appreciated. Above all, let's all be kind to each other.

Looking forward with hope that this New Year will usher in a time of healing for us all.

Karen Hagberg, Editor

COVID SNAPSHOTS

Familiar Camaraderie in a Virtual Workshop

***By Laura Kauppi,
Buffalo, New York***

We've heard 2020 described in so many ways: exceptional, different, difficult, overwhelming. Everyone struggled to find "the new normal," so it was extremely refreshing to find out that the Greater Philadelphia Suzuki Association was still running their October workshop with Rae Kate Shen, albeit virtually.

Master classes and teaching workshops are the hallmark of the Suzuki Method. I was happy to be invited, as teacher training was one of the things I had been missing about the new normal. With about a dozen teachers participating and 36 students, this workshop was one of the first things all year that felt familiar. Despite major differences, the format of the workshop remained the same as ever.

One major difference was that all teachers submitted videos of their students' playing ahead of time, and during the workshop, Rae Kate toggled between the submitted video and the student working live. This way, if there were any technological issues during the live lessons, the students could still receive valid feedback on their pieces.

This aspect of the workshop allowed Rae Kate to determine ahead of time what she

was going to work on with each student. For example, there were three students playing Minuet 2, and while all three of them struggled with triplets, she only spent the majority of one master class working on triplets, assuming that the teachers of the other two students would then apply that lesson to their own students. One of them was my student, and that's exactly what I did. For another Minuet 2 student, she worked on counting dotted half notes, another aspect of the piece that applied to multiple students. Having seen the videos ahead of time, Rae Kate was able to avoid redundancy while best helping everyone by demonstrating different teaching techniques to each student.

Most helpful of all, she gave a talk to parents in which she discussed the difficulties involved in switching to virtual lessons. She reiterated the importance of parents' watching lessons, reminded parents how important it is to help the child only when the teacher asks, and discussed the importance of allowing the child time to make their own mistakes (versus correcting the child right away). This talk was extremely helpful for the parents who attended, but also gave me and the other

teachers better ways to bring up these issues with parents in our own studios.

Despite being behind computer screens, the same camaraderie was felt as in in-person workshops, the same nerves when it was our students' turn to perform, and the same excitement hearing other students perform. It was a refreshing breath of normality for what has been a strange year.



Juliette Hardy, age 7, performing Happy Farmer for the workshop



Laura Kauppi

COVID SNAPSHOTS (cont'd)

Lauretta's Suzuki Piano Studio COVID-Friendly

Christmas Recital

By Lauretta Russell, Atlanta, Georgia

Every year for over 20 years I have hosted a holiday recital at my home followed by a potluck dinner. Alas,

because of COVID-19, we could not have our indoor recital nor could we play at the department store as we did last year. So

I, along with a couple of my parents, brainstormed and decided to have an outdoor recital on a float and parade around the neighborhood.



The Suzuki float in Atlanta, 2020, decorated for the Christmas holiday.

One of my parents had a brother-in-law who had a flatbed trailer and car with electrical power. Another parent had an amplifier and also secured a very nice, 88-key electric piano. Their parents live in a senior townhome community and we got permission from the homeowners association to parade our concert there. Both parents decorated our float, secured the piano onto the float, tested it out to make sure it worked, and got bales of hay for people to sit on. (No need for adjustable benches here, just a bale of hay and some cushions and the footstools!) On the day of the event they brought antiseptic wipes for the piano and

footstools, and even made the sign which hung on the car. All I had to do was teach the Christmas pieces to the performers.

At 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, December 13th, a beautiful sunny day, we all met at the clubhouse in this community and each student was able to play their Christmas songs many times as we navigated the streets around the neighborhood. The residents were sitting outside on lawn chairs waiting for our float to come by with the music.



Residents of a senior community enjoying the Christmas music presented by Laretta's Suzuki students in Atlanta, Georgia.

This was an awesome experience for everyone involved and, COVID or no COVID, we will be doing it again next year!

**Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation
Treasurer's Report
January 1-December 31, 2020**

Starting Balance:	\$12,848.43
Income:	+\$12,014.21
<u>Expenses:</u>	<u>-\$6,579.38</u>
Ending Balance:	\$18,283.26

Expenses

Legal/Accounting	\$400.00
Bank Fees	\$34.00
Supplies	\$9.81
Postage	\$799.92
Printing	\$1,081.65
Refund	\$10.00
Taxes/License	\$44.00
<u>Compensations</u>	<u>\$4,200.00</u>
Total	\$6,579.38

Income

Dues	\$8,804.00
Donations	\$771.01
Materials sales	\$764.20
Kataoka Memorial	\$1,220.00
Bert Mayers Memorial	\$185.00
<u>Foundation Scholarship</u>	<u>\$270.00</u>
Total	\$12,014.21

Current Fund Balances

General:	\$5,824.20
Donations:	\$5,771.51
Kataoka Memorial	\$4,007.55
General Scholarship	\$1,707.50
<u>Bert Mayers Scholarship</u>	<u>\$ 972.50</u>
Total:	\$18,283.26

*Respectfully submitted by Linda Nakagawa, Treasurer
Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation*

2021 Directory

Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation members will receive a hard copy of the 2021 Directory in the mail before the end of the month. You will also receive an email copy for distribution to family members who may want it.

If your name does not appear in the Directory and you believe that you have renewed your membership, please contact Treasurer Linda Nakagawa at nakagawalinda@gmail.com. We will miss those who have left us, although it is not surprising, during this pandemic, if some teachers have chosen retirement rather than attempting to keep their studios going in these hard times. This will be the last newsletter you will receive if you are not listed in the Directory.

The rest of you are invited to continue inspiring each other by submitting your experiences, hopes, dreams, programs, anecdotes to our Covid Snapshots feature. We all love hearing from you, your students, and your parents. Happy New Year 2021.



Welcome, New Family Members:

From the Studio of Karmelita Bawar

Sitterding Family

From the Studio of Renee Eckis

Green Family

Kolvatenko Family

From the Studio of Jamie Hanselman

Bui Family

Chellappa Family

Conforti Family

Katta Family

MacGregor Family

Valentine Family

From the Studio of Ann Taylor

Storey Family

From the Studio of Carol Novak

Keplar Family

Lawrence Family

From the Studio of Carole Mayers

Butera Family

Fries Family

Hong Family

Kerchner Family

Liu Family

Mahajanam Family

Oh Family

Ormont Family

Pandya Family

Rubin Family

Sequeira Family

Schurmans Family