

The Bow: A Suzuki-L Discussion

3 - 7 March 2008

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Contributions (in chronological order):

**Suzanne Lichtenstein, Pam Werner, Robin Jacobs, Carol Wunderle,
Robin Blankenship, Karen Hagberg, Carol Schoen, Jocelyn Morrow,
Bruce Boiney, Kenneth Wilburn, Leah Brammer, Vicki Merley,
Karmalita Bawar, Debbie Betz, Elaine Worley, and Kay Veteto**

URL: <http://core.ecu.edu/hist/wilburnk/SuzukiPianoBasics/Suzuki-L/bow.pdf>

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

From: Suzanne Lichtenstein, Carbondale, PA, US
<pianoteachersuzanne@yahoo.com>
Date: 3 March 2008

When starting and ending the lesson, do you as teachers use the bow? I understand there are two good reasons for bowing, and maybe more: one is teaching respect, and the other is teaching balance.

However, the bow is natural in Asian culture. As a person whose primary study in college was Asian culture, I have deep respect for the place of the bow in society. Nevertheless, I do not see it as a part of American culture in particular. (Forgive me for focusing on the U.S. I am concerned with how to become a genuine Suzuki teacher in rural northeastern Pennsylvania.)

Now, there is much in American culture that deserves criticism. Let me state outright that I am not interested in asserting one culture's worth over another. That would go completely against my grain.

What I am after, is whether there is a more culturally-appropriate way to begin and end lessons in each culture. As I understand it, the Suzuki Method seeks to produce students who will grow into adults with loving hearts and a desire to do good in the world. This should be true regardless of what culture they are growing up in, and should be able to be taught using that culture's highest forms of politeness.

Let me give an example. I am an Orthodox Christian, and my family attends a Greek Orthodox church. We have also attended Orthodox churches whose cultures are Russian, Antiochian (Arabic), Ukrainian, Serbian, and Ethiopian. In the United States, you can find all these Orthodox churches and more--even Indian and Chinese Orthodox churches.

These are all part of the Eastern Orthodox Church. When the immigrants from these churches came to the United States and Canada, they brought their own languages and cultures. They even brought their own priests. It wasn't even until about fifty years ago that all these churches realized they were the same faith, because their customs and languages were so different.

But today, we can visit each others churches. And when we are in a Russian church, we will follow the Russian customs; in an Arabic church, the Arabic customs; in a Greek church, the Greek customs. But the theology is all the same. The worship services are all the same. Only the outward customs vary.

I would propose that the bow is an outward custom, and not central to the Suzuki method. But an interesting thing about outward customs is that they almost always have a counterpart in other cultures. In fact, I cannot think of a single outward custom that is based on manners and what Kataoka Sensei calls "sensibility," that does not have a counterpart in other cultures. Good manners and sensibility are so valued in every society, that their cultivation is universal. (And likewise, every culture moans about the poor manners of the younger generations and the degradation of society. When that younger generation grows up, they complain about the next ones, and so on.)

So, what is the equivalent of a bow for starting and stopping lessons in other countries besides Japan? I am particularly interested in the United States, since that is where I am teaching. What can we use to promote balance, respect, and whatever else the bow is supposed to promote?

From: Pam Werner, Maumelle, AR <musicpam@gmail.com>
Date: 3 March 2008

I understand the points you are making in your email about other cultures.

I decided to use the bow until I understood the benefits. My thinking is that if another culture has something of value, I'm going to use it until I determine there is no value or I find something of more value.

One of the things I noticed when I went to Japan is that the environment was so clean. You didn't find trash and you didn't even see trashy cars. I thought to myself, oh, if only we could have this in the good old USA. (I'm always scratching my head when I see trash lining our roads and highways - why would anyone be so thoughtless to dirty up our beautiful world like that? I have absolutely no understanding of the answer to this perplexing question. Apparently respect has to be taught and modeled. I was taught respect and I taught my children respect. It would hurt me very much to know that any of my children would be so careless as to disrespect our environment or other human beings!)

Anyway, back to the bow. I have found several things through the many years of using it. The most amazing thing about the bow for me is how it brings me to focus on the student I'm teaching and the lesson we are about to begin. It also helps me remember how special this student is that I'm about to teach and reminds me of the responsibility I have to lead this child with the right attitude of respect and honor. If there is some distraction and we are sitting at the piano without a bow, I feel it immediately and cannot continue with the lesson without getting up and having that bow. It has become that powerful.

I have also found that a lot of students today take some form of martial arts so they are very comfortable and familiar with the bow.

When I bow with a beginning student, it is SO easy (because of the years of experience) to determine how ready they are to begin the lesson. I know EXACTLY what frame of mind they are in with how they do the bow. For example, you can see if they are in balance - if they bow and lose their balance, we do it again by getting more focus and concentration. This helps them prepare better for the lesson. You can tell if they've had a bad day or just any number of things about where they are emotionally - all in the beginning bow

For beginning students, we practice the bow - it is the beginning of demonstrating the best practice efforts - not just in bowing, but at the piano. I make sure they look at me before and AFTER the bow. Having to look eye to eye is powerful. It is especially critical after the bow because that's where the best focus comes. I make sure my eyes are smiling as much as I possibly can when they look at me both times. This helps me to honor them as my students)

As you mentioned, the bow is a wonderful way to show respect. I make sure the student follows my bow - not lead the bow. Many times I will wait extra time to help them get focus and to make sure they are willing to follow my bow instead of bowing before me. This helps them build confidence and trust in me as their teacher who wishes to lead them. This is especially great for those students who are always the leader or always wanting to be the first at everything. We all must learn to be good followers. For some this is not at all easy. The bow helps them learn it in such a subtle, non-threatening and wonderful way.

The ending bow is my favorite. I teach my students it is my favorite because that's where we both enjoy smiling really big at each other - saying thank you for the special experience we've just had. Then I add the big American hug after the bow. It's a great combination. I want the lesson to always end on a very positive, "feel good" note. Sometimes a student struggles in the lesson because they haven't practiced. At least they leave with a warm and fuzzy feeling because of our ending bow and hug. (The hugs are for the younger students - teenagers typically don't want the hug but they enjoy the bow. I enjoy giving them that great big smile - both with my mouth and eyes for a job well done or for at least giving it their best - because of the focus the bow brings, they have to take time to see that big smile I give them).

I guess you can tell that I absolutely LOVE the bow. In the beginning I certainly didn't understand the power of the bow. But through the years I have learned that I could never teach without the bow. I teach adults and at first tried not to bow with them. But guess what? I couldn't do it. I realized I needed to bow with them for the exact same reasons I've mentioned above. The biggest reason is the powerful impact it has on ME, my teaching, and my attitude towards the student.

Hope this helps.

From: Robin Jacobs, Raleigh, NC <mtwithrobin@yahoo.com>
Date: 3 March 2008

I always explained to the family that when we bow to each other in the beginning of the lesson, as the teacher, through my bow I am saying I am ready to teach you and the student is telling the teacher from their bow they are ready to learn. Setting the framework of focusing on the lesson and connecting the two of us on a non-verbal level, on our sense level. Which is so important, as so much of our teaching the children absorb through their senses. I love the fact that we bow/acknowledge each other at the same time, to me this sets the tone of "co-workers." At our ending bow, I did have my students says "thank you for teaching me" and I would thank them for being my student and when they were little, usually a spontaneous hug was involved too! I encourage the parent and child to start and end the practice lesson at home the same way. I feel this helps set the tone to bring the focus of study on music generalize to the home practice from the studio.

I agree with you that there always seems to be a cultural way of expressing a similar idea of any "Universal Truth." However, I've racked my brains for the American way of stopping for a moment and become totally present in the present moment (this is biggest change I experience when exchanging bows) and I can't come up with any ritual or pattern we Americans do to experience that. Or similarly to "be still" as in "ready position."

I feel sharing this bow with my American families has given them a tool and maybe brought to their awareness for the first time, how to "stop the world" all around you and be together in this moment.

Robin Jacobs, from Raleigh, NC (through my peers, you know me as Robin Stroud from Greenville, NC)

From: Carol Wunderle, San José, Costa Rica, <carol@pianopathway.com >
Date: 3 March 2008

In answer to Suzanne's questions on the bow:

I remember listing over 50 values of the bow when I was attending Dr. Haruko Kataoka Sensei's classes. It is an extremely important part of the class. Here are just a few:

1. It teaches the student to make a professional bow following a performance in a recital automatically. If they aren't doing this every lesson, I've found for the most part they aren't able to do it in a performance. It must be an automatic reflex, or the feet are apart, the hands and arms are stiff, and the bow just isn't a natural response to the applause. I find the students do beautiful bows every time they perform no matter where or when they do it before and after every lesson.
2. It teaches from the very first lesson the procedure for learning everything thereafter: They must master one thing at a time. They have to do a good bow before they are permitted to learn how to get on the bench. It is the very first and very important step in the learning process.
3. It teaches body balance. After they can bow properly, they carry that same posture to the bench when they are sitting. The feet are secured directly in front of the student on the foot stool; so they could stand on them as they do in the bow with the feet together.
3. It establishes a respectful rapport between the student, teacher, and parent. Some teachers instruct their students to say "help me to learn to play the piano" at the beginning bow, and "thank you for the class" at the end bow. Note: I did that for a while; then I found the very young students, would say that when they bowed in a performance - it was confusing for them to do it in the class and not in the performance; so I quit doing it. But, recently, I had a parent tell me they make their child say it when they bow before and after the practice session at home. Most of my parents begin and end the home practice sessions with the bow. It is marvelous mind preparation for learning and having a good practice session. I always tell the parents the bow will tell them the mood and attitude of the child. If it isn't good in the bow, it won't be good in the practice or the class. It has to be fixed in the bow before getting on the bench or the practice should be postponed to a more appropriate time. This saves a lot of possible anguish on the bench.
4. It relaxes the student and sets the mood of the student before beginning the lesson.

There are so many different cultures in my studio, the word never comes up in reference to the bow. Everyone understands the value of the bow as part of professional performance for musicians. The perfect bow is the mark of a good performer showing respect for the audience by signifying "thank you" for your applause. I'm so grateful for this and every part of the Suzuki training.

From: Robin Blankenship <rblan545@aol.com>
Date: 3 March 2008

I have several thoughts on the bow, and also on understanding how to teach Suzuki Piano in general.

First, there are no rules how we "should" implement Dr. Suzuki's philosophy of "Talent Education". Dr. Kataoka was always researching better ways to produce tone, be relaxed and how to convey this to the students we teach. She always encouraged us to do research ourselves, and with each other, to improve our own playing and teaching. I commend you for your research and quest in how to become the best teacher you can. I think nothing can replace actual experience through our senses of listening and watching. I encourage you to attend Piano Basics Workshops and observe lessons being taught. You might be able to visit an experienced teacher in their studio and observe lessons. This is invaluable.

The "natural" way of learning Dr Suzuki talks about, is also relevant for teachers and adults. Just as it is impossible to learn how to play the piano over the internet (in my opinion!), it is also difficult to convey how to teach over the internet. Although there is much to be learned through the resources available to us now on the internet- especially now that we have the technology to watch Dr. Kataoka teach lessons while sitting at our computer.

Much of what I learned when first starting out - came to me indirectly through my senses - just as the children in our studios learn. Talking to other teachers, watching recitals at Institutes, taking lessons myself, being a mom with my daughter at summer workshops, observing in experienced teachers studios, going to Japan are some of the ways that I have learned.

As for the Bow - there is a very practical reason for teaching it at every lesson. All musicians bow in some way as part of their performance. It is a way for the performer to express appreciation and gratitude to the audience for their applause. The bow says "thank-you for listening to me play for you". The experience of bowing in the lesson with the teacher, showing mutual respect for each other, carries over into the student's performance on the stage.

The bow is a form of communication. I ask my students to have eye contact with me, and take time while doing the bow. I ask for the same things in practicing for recitals and in the recital. Suzuki students generally love to perform. They are used to playing in front of others from a young age from observing other students and being observed themselves. I think the ability to walk on stage with confidence, look out at the audience and bow is invaluable training and experience for children that will be with them for the rest of their life.

The bow can also be used as an indication of readiness to begin lesson for a young child. A young child spends time in the studio listening and watching other children take lessons before they take their first lesson. When a child agrees to come up and take a bow, it shows that the child, of whatever age, is ready to take instruction from the teacher. This is their very first experience with the teacher asking them to follow instructions.

I hope to meet you this summer at a workshop or Institute!

From: Karen Hagberg, Rochester, New York <kh@hagbergsuzuki.com>
Date: 3 March 2008

There is one single, very important reason for beginning and ending lessons with a bow, precisely because bowing is not something we do culturally. Most American students, even European students these days, bow for the first time on a stage, in front of an audience, with hardly any previous instruction about how it is done so that it looks natural. The inexperienced performer then has to cope with feeling awkward and inappropriate even before sitting down to play the first note of a piece.

My book *_Stage Presence From Head to Toe: a Manual for Musicians_* was conceived after I had studied in Japan for nearly four years, after which time I realized how important it is for the performer to know how to walk out onto a stage, how to address the audience, how to bow, how to sit down and get really ready to play. I know of no better reason to bow before and after each lesson, so that students in this "non-bowing" culture can get comfortable doing it. Believe me, like everything else it takes ten years to teach students to bow well even when doing it every week.

From: Carol Schoen, Washington, DC, US <bschoen@cox.net>
Date: 3 March 2008

I have accompanied a number of violin recitals, both Suzuki and traditional. The traditional teachers have quite a time getting their students (usually teens) to bow. They won't bend at their waist, they won't tip their head to look at the floor for even a moment.

The Suzuki students, who are used to bowing several times during each lesson, have no problems bowing at the beginning and end of their performances on stage. I love that our Suzuki students grow up knowing how to bow and are not embarrassed through their teen years to give a good "performer's" bow at the end of every performance.

From: Jocelyn Morrow, Golden, Colorado <Jocelyn@JocelynMorrow.com>
Date: 3 March 2008

I think Pam Werner summed it all up for me. Thank you for expressing so eloquently your thoughts all about the bow and its "power" or "presence" in the lessons. I couldn't have expressed it better or with more clarity.

In my studio, we always bow both before and after. However, I do not bow with my adults, as Pam does, but I'm thrilled that she has success with that. I think the bow is essential to the Suzuki method. In fact, I have a handful of traditional students and we do an ending bow (and hug for the little ones, too) at each lesson.

I recently attended a High School Piano Recital at my daughter's school: The Denver School for Performing Arts. I heard almost 2 solid hours (no intermission) of Scriabin, Beethoven, Prokofiev, Chopin, Bach, etc. Only one boy, 10th grader, had a proper bow. He was my student, and Suzuki trained. All the other students had either no bow, never looked up or offered a smile before the bow, or simply slightly nodded their head as they were turning and headed fast for their seat in the audience. I was also very disappointed in their choice of performance attire. I teach all this to my students: stage presence, choice of clothes, the look up and smile, the bow and the exit walk. To me it makes for the total package.

From: Bruce Boiney, Louisville, KY <boiney@suzukipiano.com>
Date: 3 March 2008

There are a number of reasons for using the lesson bow here in the United States:

1. It demonstrates the respect that the teacher and student have for each other and for the learning process.
2. It demarcates the beginning and end of the lesson. Both teacher and parent can focus better between the bows.
3. It helps the child learn physical balance, poise, and self-control.
4. It prepares the student to give an elegant performance bow.
5. It allows the teacher to make eye contact with the students, so as to connect with them and assess their mood, thoughts, lesson readiness, etc.
6. It assists the parent at home.
7. It finishes the lesson in a positive, affirming way.

I teach the bow in the following way: The student and teacher face each other and make eye contact. The teacher is the one to begin the bow and waits until the student has good eye contact and is completely settled. At the end of the bow, the student does not move to go to the piano until the teacher breaks eye contact and moves. This teaches the student to follow the lead of the teacher, but it is also about the student developing self control. To be able to wait for the teacher is to be in control of one's body, to choose when to bow.

This approach to the bow sets the tone for the rest of lesson and other skills develop more easily as a result. One example is the student having the ability to get ready to play a note and then wait for the teacher to say: "Go." This brings order to the lesson, places the student's focus on the teacher, and allows the teacher to regulate the pace of the lesson, whether faster or slower. Once again, it is also about the student developing the ability to be "ready" on his or her own. Being ready is to prepare to do something and then do it properly. It is more than just having the correct finger on the right key; it is a presence of mind. In a very unassuming and non-confrontational way, the bow helps in this development.

I remember very clearly one of the first lessons that I observed in Dr. Kataoka's studio in Matsumoto. I came in on the middle of the lesson and the young student not only played very well, but had amazing concentration and focus. Her younger sibling, who was "observing," was acting in a much more age appropriate way-crawling around on the floor, making noise, even hitting the mother while she was trying to pay attention to the lesson. Although I was very impressed by the student's lesson, I was even more amazed at what happened at its conclusion. The student got off the bench, bowed, and immediately became a typical, rambunctious kid, while her sibling, got up, bowed, and was transformed into another amazing, focused student. Just like that they switched roles. I was struck by how children could be totally "normal" kids and also study piano in a wonderful way. The bow is of course, not magic-it is the teacher who develops this kind of ability in children-but we can use the bow to help students enter into this kind of learning environment.

The same is true at home. From the beginning stages of instruction, I ask the parent to bow with the child at the beginning and end of home practice. When the child is still just learning how to bow properly, they are ostensibly just practicing it for the next lesson with the teacher, but it's incorporation into the home practice helps the parent to formalize that time and, over time, it has all the same benefits at home that it does at the lesson.

In addition to all of this, the lesson bow sets the stage for a wonderful recital bow. I teach that the performance bow is the same as the lesson bow, except that instead of looking at me, the student chooses a focal point in the back of hall. They should look at that point, bow, look at the point again for a moment, and THEN go to the piano or exit the stage. This is not easy when children are excited about performing, but it is possible if the elements of the bow are in place as a result of having been done each week at the lesson and at home. This is developing the ability to bow through repetition, as opposed to relying only on lots of last minute coaching, which does not work well.

The decision to use the bow in the United States is, like everything, up to the teacher. It is healthy to question its purpose and validity before adopting the practice. If the teacher is convinced of its benefits and uses it in lessons, parents and children will accept it as well.

[Web Editor's Note: This is a revision of the original posting.]

From: Kenneth Wilburn, Greenville, NC <wilburnk@ecu.edu>
Date: 3 March 2008

While updating the links section of the SPBF home page, I came across a valuable resource related to the discussion of the bow. In 1976 Dr. Suzuki spent a couple of weeks at the American Suzuki Institute at the University of Wisconsin. He gave a series of lectures which were filmed. They have since been edited and digitized. Three appear to be lectures on the bow.

The following address will lead you to the home page. Once you have read the description of the project and the information on Dr. Suzuki, click on the camera just above Dr. Suzuki's photo. That will take you to the list of Dr. Suzuki's videos. The first two and the last video in the list concern the bow. You will need Real Player to view them. The URL to the collection's home page is:

<http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/Arts/subcollections/SuzukiAbout.html>

From: Leah Brammer, Core Suzuki Piano, Palo Alto, CA
<lbrammer@mindspring.com>
Date: 3 March 2008

To Ken and the other members,

There are so many great ideas on the bow in the e-mails I am receiving. I would like to consider the idea of organizing these into a reference for the future that could be accessed on the Piano Basics Website under "Contributions from

teachers on the Bow" or something like this. This could be an open file where others could also contribute. Also, people could choose to have theirs taken off if they did not want it there. This way the great contributions from teachers can be saved for future reference. Future topics may evolve. It would require work by the web editor however! Please let me know if there is some way I can help.

Anyway, here is a note I wrote to the parents in my studio several years ago. Please feel free to use it with the parents in your studio. Thank-you to all the teachers for their great ideas. There is so much we can learn from each other.

From the studio notes of Leah Brammer:

Please and Thank-you

Parents,

Please bow every day at home before and after piano practice. This is very important.

The bow has the same meaning at home as in the lesson. To bow at the beginning is to agree to work together. It is a matter of respect. Make sure that you have eye contact at the beginning and end of the bow. This connection with the other person helps establish good feelings.

To bow at the end is to say thank-you for your time and energy, and we are done.

In Japan bowing is a matter of everyday life. Children grow up with it the same way we grow up with phrases such as: "Hello, how are you?", "Thank-you for having me", " please" and "thank-you". In every culture, it is part of education to learn to appreciate and communicate with other people.

In recitals, the bow shows appreciation and communication with the audience. To bow at the beginning the performer is saying "please listen and enjoy my playing." When the audience claps they are saying "ok".

At the end of the performance the bow means "Thank-you for listening to me" and the corresponding clapping means "Thank-you for playing."

Performers all over the world recognize the significance and importance of the bow.

It is very simple, but also very important for pianist to learn that the bow is an integral part of the performance. Without a good bow, the performance cannot be good. With daily practice the bow will feel natural and the child will gain self-confidence from this repetition.

Please bow every day as part of practice and see how this communication between you and your child can bring good feeling to your time together.

Just like please and Thank-you.

From: Vicki Merley, Oro Valley, Arizona <vmerley@gmail.com>

Date: 3 March 2008

Thank you all for the wonderful words on the importance and place of the "bow".

I just remember how I felt when I bowed to Kataoka Sensei: as an adult seeking instruction, I was so grateful, and humble, and honored to have the chance to learn from her. I bowed with greatest respect, and reverence.

I bow to all my students, of every age, and they bow back.

From: Pam Werner <musicpam@gmail.com>

Date: 4 March 2008

Leah, I sure agree about putting all the bow emails in a folder so we can review them often. The comments are a wonderful treasure.

I want to thank Suzanne for asking such great questions because it has allowed for some of the best sharing I have seen on this listserv. I wish I would have had this when I was first starting out - being so isolated and not knowing where to find answers until I finally stumbled upon the teaching sessions with Kataoka Sensei. I feel so blessed to have learned from so many of you who are sharing on this listserv. It warms my heart when I read your responses and input because you are the ones who helped me get to where I am today. Thank you, thank you, thank you :-). I want to give you all a big hug. To the rest of you I don't know yet, I'd love to give you a hug, too, because I'm getting insights from you as well.

Thanks, Ken, for always searching for new ideas and resources for us - like finding the Dr. Suzuki video. I didn't even know that resource existed. You are absolutely amazing!!!

From: Suzanne Lichtenstein, Carbondale, PA, US
<pianoteachersuzanne@yahoo.com>
Date: 4 March 2008

Thank you to everyone who has responded. You have presented compelling reasons for using the bow in American culture.

Now I wonder how to win the parents and students over on this. I know that martial arts students are familiar with the bow, but they also pay respect to foreign flags during the intro to the lessons. Martial Arts are portrayed as Asian. But most people around here see piano lessons as American as apple pie.

Leah, thank you for including the letter you send home with parents. Would others please share letters or explanations they give to parents? Also, how do I introduce this to teen-aged transfer students?

From: Karmalita Bawar <kbawar@EARTHLINK.NET>
Date: 4 March 2008

I agree with Leah, and would love to have something tangible on the website to refer new parents to with specific regard to the bow.

[Web Editor's Note: Once the thread (conversation) on the bow has concluded, I will create a single document from all the postings and make that document accessible as a link from the SPBF home page. Once I have done this I will announce it on Suzuki-L. At that point, if anyone wants his/her remarks deleted, I will remove your comments in a revised document. I will create the document in Adobe Reader format.]

From: Debbie Betz, Newport News, VA <dbetz6@juno.com>
Date: 4 March 2008

I think that our attitude about the bow is the most important factor of bringing our students and parents into the experience. If we are sold, then they will be sold. It is just part of the lesson just like brushing your teeth is part of getting ready for bed. I have never had anyone balk. I always started my parents for 4 lessons without the child before the child started. I was able to explain everything at that point. If they have objections, they can get them out of their system then, without the child being there. But I really can't recall objections since everyone knows that bowing at performances is just part of being a musician. Also, when the children observe lessons before they start their own and they see others bowing, they see that it is just part of what we are doing. Children are much less complicated than adults are. If they see others doing it they probably will, too. This is positive peer pressure.

From: Suzanne Lichtenstein, Carbondale, PA, US
<pianoteachersuzanne@yahoo.com>
Date: 4 March 2008

Well, I did it. I introduced bowing at my lesson today. The students are a 3-yr-old and 5-yr-old sister and brother, and my 5-yr-old son. As Debbie Betz wrote, bowing is just something musicians do, and that is how I presented it to the students and parent.

This was the students' second lesson, so the bow fit in perfectly with the lesson on "Getting Ready." I was able to show the mother how the bow and "getting ready" exercise steadied her children, providing a calm in the storm. I suggested she use the bow at home with the practice sessions, and I think she really will do it.

I have to think more about how to introduce the bow to my transfer students, who range in age from 8 to 14 years old, and one 22-yr-old. My little ones today have known only Suzuki lessons.

From: Pam Werner, Arkansas <musicpam@gmail.com>
Date: 4 March 2008

Way to go, Suzanne!!

Here's a suggestion: Let your older students know that you want to try implementing a new idea and you were wondering if they would help you do it. When they ask what they need to do, let them know that you need them to bow with you at the beginning and end of the lesson so you can practice your bow. Most students seem more willing to "help us out" than if they think we are doing something for their benefit.

Good luck!

From: Elaine Worley, Pocatello, Idaho, USA <jtwebw@juno.com>
Date: 7 March 2008

I first learned of Dr. Suzuki's "new idea" when I was enrolled as a music major at Idaho State University. My music theory professor asked if I had any children. He wanted to try this new idea of teaching and was going to Japan to find out about it. He was delighted to hear that we had a six-year-old daughter to which he exclaimed (literally), "Let's try it out on her!!" And the fun began.

He went straight to Matsumoto, became fast friends with Dr. Suzuki, and found out how to teach little children to play small violins and returned with a 1/4 size instrument for Diane. We were off on the greatest adventure of our lives. Soon our son, Darren, had a violin also. Six years later, John David, our last child wanted to play--but he wanted to hold the tiny violin in front of him--refusing to put it on his shoulder, so the cello CD was added to our expanding listening collection. The common thread for all of them was "the bow." People were always enchanted by their poise and stage presence. John's instrument was a viola fitted with an end pin!

With "the bow" as their common thread, each of them learned how to present him and herself as a professional performer would. Showing respect for the audience, the teacher, the clinician, any relatives that wanted to hear them play--they were treated with courtesy and respect in the form of a very professional bow, much to their delight.

When Diane was eighteen years old, she went to Matsumoto to study with Dr. Suzuki for three years. She lived with the Fukazawa family, who agreed to take her in as if she were their own child. A year later, my husband was concerned about her situation, so I went to Japan to see for myself how she was doing. She was more than fine. The Fukazawa family had definitely lived up to their promise. She was so confident, could bow perfectly, could speak the language, and perform so professionally I couldn't believe my ears. And, every lesson began and ended with a very professional bow. I learned that the bow had a very important purpose. The teacher and student face one another with perfect posture and bow, showing mutual respect. What a wonderful way to greet one another, and to establish the beginning of the instruction. After the study is completed, the teacher and student again faced one another and bowed and the student said something that was the equivalent of "thank you".

Since I began teaching the Suzuki piano approach, we always begin the lesson standing, facing each other, and greet one another with "good morning," or "good afternoon," depending on the time of day. The parent stands by the child who is younger than ten, then we bow and greet one another with the appropriate greeting. Children older than ten come on their own, and we greet the same way each week. The students can present themselves comfortably in all sorts of situations. It is a very simple way to greet, and define that the lesson has begun. The parent returns to the chair provided, out of the student's range of vision.

This simple custom has served us well for the past 39 years, with all six of our children. They all studied an instrument. They all sing. They all know how to present themselves in a public situation--whether speaking, performing various instruments, or singing (ensemble or solo). And they can always conclude with a proper bow, when appropriate. All 37 of our grandchildren have benefited from learning an instrument and the confidence it has given

them in many situations not related to music. Being able to show mutual respect comfortably is a asset to any child's ability. The youngest, 18 months old, comes to the piano--stands perfectly still, and we bow before she sits on the adjustable bench, with the foot boxes just right for her size.

Of course, we realize that not all of our children or grandchildren or students will be musicians or performers, but they will always feel comfortable presenting whatever it is they are able to do, and will definitely know when and how to bow.

From: Kay Veteto <kdveteto@yahoo.com>

Date: 7 March 2008

Beautifully shared. Thank you for sharing your experience with us.