

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
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*How to Capture
the Hearts of Children*
(Part 1 of 3)

By Haruko Kataoka

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Translated by Chisa Aoki and
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Edited by Karen Hagberg

Introduction by Dr. Kazue Iinuma
of the Iinuma Clinic, parent of a
longtime student in Dr. Kataoka's
studio:

I would like to introduce Haruko
Kataoka Sensei. She started piano at
the age of six and performed on many
occasions at an early age. In those
days she was considered a prodigy, a
genius. In 1955, she became very
interested in the late Shinichi Suzuki
Sensei's Suzuki Method, the music
education that does not begin with the
musical score, but instead focuses on
listening to each and every tone.

This prompted her to move to Matsumoto. Ever
since then, she has been actively involved in
research for the piano department of the
Talent Education Institute in Matsumoto. The
Suzuki Method is a highly regarded music
education today within international circles.
Kataoka Sensei has traveled abroad every year
since 1972 to teach the Suzuki Method.

Having just returned from her travels a few
days ago, she has consented to join us at our
request amidst her very busy schedule. For the
last 10 years, she has been working on a totally
innovative endeavor involving the simultaneous

performance of 10 pianos. I remember my utter surprise when my old traditional way of thinking was completely overturned by this project.

In 1986, she received the Arts and Culture Award of Matsumoto City, and in 1990 she was the recipient of an honorary doctorate in Music from the University of Louisville in Louisville, Kentucky and in addition to other such honors.

I would like to share my personal experience. My daughter was one of Sensei's students. Now, there is a saying, "Every child is nurtured, depending on the parent." I have to admit I am on the top of the list of ineffective parents. The day before a lesson, I used to make my daughter practice like crazy. When I realized this last minute practice was useless, I would think of skipping the lesson. But my daughter would insist on going anyhow, and I had no choice but to take her. Ever since that time I am a parent who owes a great deal to Sensei.

What is so amazing about Sensei is that, despite my ineptitude as a parent, she would still continue to encourage my daughter and patiently maintain her interest in music. While teaching us both the skill of discerning the most beautiful tone, I am so grateful that we, both of us, parent and child, received general education for human life as well. I am filled with awe to have witnessed Sensei's vitality and wonderful romanticism, not only as a parent but as an individual human being.

Without further ado, I invite Sensei to begin her talk and share her thoughts with us.

As so kindly introduced by Dr. linuma, my name is Haruko Kataoka. First, I would like to talk to you about Dr. linuma, who shared so much in her introduction. I am so impressed by her modesty, a rare quality in this day and age. Dr. linuma is truly a wonderful mother. It has been thirty years since she brought her three-year-old daughter for piano lessons. She told me then that because she worked and was very busy, she would be unable to attend lessons. Unsympathetically, I told her that I would not teach a child whose parent was not present at the lessons. As we were discussing our differences, I dismissed her in my mind as someone who could not succeed in my studio. The following week she showed up for the lesson. She continued to come to lessons without a single absence until her daughter entered middle school. It wasn't until much later that I happened to hear that she was an extremely busy pediatric doctor at the National Hospital.

Ignorance is bliss and a very powerful thing. I

used to reprimand her repeatedly to quit her job and start sincerely focusing on the education of her child. Dr. linuma has probably forgotten all this. The grandmother would bring the little girl to my studio, and Dr. linuma always adjusted her schedule to be able to meet them at lesson times. I was so impressed. What an incredible mother! I have met so many wonderful individuals who have influenced me and I am finally just starting to understand their impact. It is my fortune today to have this opportunity to see you again and I thank you, Dr. linuma.

It gives me great pleasure to have the opportunity to talk in front of an audience of pediatric doctors. When I was in grade school, we were acquainted with many families of medical professionals. I had overheard my mother and other adults saying that the most outstanding doctors were pediatricians and surgeons. It was impressed upon me since childhood that within the medical field, pediatricians are eminent.

Recently an article was written in the Asahi Newspaper about a famous person. I chuckled to myself as I read the article because it confirmed my longtime opinion. It said, that the work of a pediatrician is monumental and that this medical specialty is chosen with the prior knowledge that it is not a particularly lucrative field, and thus pediatricians cannot be bad people. Since I work in the world of music education involving children, even though I am not a doctor, I can truly empathize with the work that pediatricians do. The writer of the article added that if you happen to see the sign for a pediatric practice when you're walking down a street, remember there is a good person in there. Reading such an article really lifted my spirits.

At this point, I would like to talk to you about Matsumoto's Suzuki Method. For some of you, this may be your first time to hear about this.

Shinichi Suzuki was a violinist. He was born in 1898 in Nagoya. His father was the first man in Japan to start manufacturing violins. The Suzuki Violin from Nagoya is still well known to this day. As the future successor to this excellent company, Dr. Suzuki was sent to business school. Afterwards, before the second World War, he went to Germany to study music for 8 years. Upon his return to Japan, the war had worsened and he moved to Kisofukushima (nearby Matsumoto). At about this time, a culturist in Matsumoto invited him to move here. Dr. Suzuki was attracted to this city where there was not yet a single child able to play the violin. This was how and why music education for children started here in Matsumoto.

During his eight years in Berlin, Dr. Suzuki was repeatedly told that the Japanese have no musicality no matter how much or how hard they may try. I remember my own childhood piano teacher, who also studied in Germany for eight years at about the same time Suzuki Sensei was there, told me the same thing. They must have felt that Europeans were implying that culture was inborn and those who did not possess such cultural abilities could never be taught. This constant disparaging reminder prompted Suzuki Sensei to ponder this problem. He believed that it couldn't be true about the absence of musicality. On the contrary, anyone can hear and appreciate beautiful music. This is when he realized the Mother Tongue Method of education.

The implication of the Mother Tongue theory is that people from any country in the world can speak their native language effortlessly. Of course, language in terms of literature is an entirely different matter, but the simple ability of fluent speech is acquired by everyone.

In Germany, no matter how hard Suzuki Sensei tried to communicate in German, his poor pronunciation could not compare with the perfect accent of three-year-old German children. However, it was safe to assume that Germans are not born predisposed to speak German fluently. He realized that it is because German children have been listening to German every day since birth that they can speak fluently. This is the truth.

I feel that Japanese is a very difficult language. Recently, I have felt such pride in being able to speak Japanese that when I go to America, I have bragged about it. By contrast, English is simple and therefore easier, but why can't they understand me? It is my pronunciation. For example when I say the names of pianists such as Ho-lo-bi-ttsu or Lubin-shu-ta-in, they don't know who I am talking about. So I say over and over, "You know, Ho-lo-bi-ttsu, U-la-ji-mee-lu Ho-lo-bi-ttsu." Then, finally, because they are music teachers, they

say, "Aah, Horowitz!" with pronunciation totally different from mine. Of course to me it doesn't sound so different, but with even subtle nuances it is hard for them to understand what I am saying.

That is why Suzuki Sensei's Mother Tongue Method of education is so wonderful. It was not just a passing thought. I feel it was an exceptional and wonderful revelation. If children from birth (and of course these days we say from the time of conception) are raised listening to good classical music every day, nobody can say that the Japanese have no musical aptitude. This was the great experiment in our town of Matsumoto. We now have succeeded in proving this theory to be true.

Because there was such a person as Dr. Suzuki, it is now possible to have Seiji Ozawa and his Saito Kinen Orchestra perform in Matsumoto, a city that has become renowned as the City of Music in Japan. And of course, it goes without saying that Matsumoto is furthermore honored by having the most outstanding and prominent Shinshu University Medical School.

Suzuki Piano Basics Web Site and discussions group:

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