

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

Editor

Karen Hagberg

Layout

Teri Paradero

Translators

Chisa Aoki
Teri Paradero

Production and Distribution

Linda Nakagawa

Send Articles to:

Piano Basics Foundation

67 Shepard St. Rochester NY 14620
kh@hagbergsuzuki.com
585-244-0490

Memberships / Subscriptions

Linda Nakagawa
242 River Acres Drive
Sacramento, CA 95831
916-422-2952
g.nakagawa@comcast.net

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Education in the Arts

By Haruko Kataoka

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Translated by Chisa Aoki and

Teri Paradero

Edited by Karen Hagberg

England's great Prime Minister Winston Churchill was fond of painting. Because of time constraints, he was not able to take art lessons. Instead, his method of study was to copy the paintings of the great masters. Germany's former Prime Minister Helmut Schmidt was able to play the piano and I believe he even made a recording of a Mozart concerto. Technically speaking, he was not considered to be a good pianist. Another of England's Prime Ministers, Edward Heath, was a very good pianist and conductor.

Politicians are not the only ones who studied the arts. The physicist Dr. Albert Einstein played both the violin and piano and was fond of holding concerts in his home according to Dr. Suzuki (when he was a young man, Dr. Suzuki lived in Berlin where he was frequently invited to these concerts in Einstein's home).

The very famous Dr. Albert Schweitzer was a highly acclaimed organist, famous throughout the world. Furthermore, his dedicated and distinguished work as a medical doctor to bring medicine to the third world country of Gabon in Africa is world renowned. He researched J.S. Bach's music in great depth and published many books on theology.

When you take a look at the civilized nations of the world, they value and understand the importance of art in life and education of the arts. I have heard

that cultured (or sophisticated) Jewish families believed that the responsibility of music education was the mother's duty when their children were born and has been recognized as a requirement for eons. In the world of classical music, amongst the most wonderful performers, there are many who are Jewish. I used to wonder why that was so. There is a reason for this. Jewish people have for generations adopted what the Talent Education Method espouses in music education.

Having taught children in Matsumoto for many years, my observation is that what is important in Japanese society today is academic education in schools. The focus is getting good test scores no matter what. It is true that the ministry of education in the Meiji period had its merits. To this day, there is no illiteracy in Japan. This is proof of the success of education. We are fortunate that what used to be the parents' job to teach children to read and write has been taken over by the schools.

However, lost in gratitude, Japanese society eventually came to see schools as the most important. People who are aware of the significant Value of the arts must come together to successfully create a wonderful society.

The arts are important for human beings. Why is that? The arts exist so we can express our senses, our spirituality. In other words, it is difficult to understand the matters of our senses because such

matters cannot be touched or be seen as compared to the ease of quantifying test scores and material possessions.

In order for Japan to be one of the leading countries of the world, we have to focus not only on those things that we can see and touch, but focus increasingly on the education of the arts.

Other civilized countries already know about the significance of the arts. In April when I went to Australia, I observed that art education is valued highly and many children were studying Suzuki violin, piano, cello and flute. The children are allowed to go to their music lessons while school is in session with permission from their teachers. Music lessons are viewed as more difficult and more important than regular classes in school, so they truly understand the value of art education.

It is inconceivable in Japan to think this way. Does that mean that Japan is a third world country in regards to art education? If our country cannot value and provide art education, we have no choice but to join together as individuals who understand its significance. Please everyone, let's work hard for our children to make this happen!

Finding Solace and Encouragement in the Arts

By Kaoru Miyashita, Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher in Matsumoto, Japan

Music overflows everywhere in my daily life. I listen to my favorite recordings or play piano or when I am feeling cheerful I sing or hum a tune. When I am overwhelmed with work and home responsibilities, and feel so tired that it seems I

cannot go on, there have been many occasions where going to a concert performed by my favorite performer helps me to relax, energize and feel happy.

Music is not something that you can separate from your life. At times, it heals you, encourages you, and cheers you up as your family would.

A middle school student of mine said, “When I become tired while studying, I feel like playing the piano. Normally, I don’t like to practice, but if I play a favorite piece, it clears my mind so I can go back

to studying again with concentration.” After 10 years of playing the piano, music has become an integral part of his life.

With the passage of time, children will encounter a myriad of experiences, but music (the arts) will be sure to comfort and support them and give them the strength to forge onward.

Come to Phoenix Workshop 2014

The Arizona Suzuki Association – Phoenix Piano Group welcomes you to come to the “Valley of the Sun” February 6 – 10, 2014, for a workshop with the Japanese teachers. (We hope that you enjoy a week of warmth in the middle of the winter!) It is a wonderful opportunity to study together, share ideas and experiences and enjoy time with friends, old and new. We also welcome your students to come take lessons and participate in the Sunday Friendship Concert. Although participants have always enjoyed lunch outside in the sunshine at the Farm and an evening together just to socialize



Photos by Vicki Merley

and enjoy great food, everyone knows that the best things are the lessons and the concert evaluations. There is always more to learn, and why not learn from the best! Won’t you join us? If you did not receive an e-mail invitation, please e-mail or call Gloria Elliott at 623-466-7447 or gelliott50@aol.com.

Now is the Time!

By Karen Hagberg, President, Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation

Membership in Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation is recorded for the calendar year. Therefore, this is the time of year to encourage your families to join. Personally, I spent several years “encouraging” them to join, however, and few did, even after I handed each of them a membership form and gave them frequent reminders.

Last year I decided to *require* that my families be members of the Foundation. I added the \$25 family membership as a surcharge on their tuition. Nobody complained. They hardly noticed. They did, however, react to the articles they were reading when they began to receive their issues. I receive comments often that show that, not only do they read them, but they learn from them. The primary parent reports that the parent who does not attend lessons has begun to understand more

about the process of working with the child at home and about how the method works in general.

In short, having all my families receive the newsletter has been a boost to my entire studio. My students and their parents have renewed their interest in workshops, institutes, and 10-Piano Concerts, and having read the same articles every other month, they have something in common to talk about. I truly encourage every Suzuki Piano Basics teacher to begin to provide this resource for their families.

Beginning in our next Directory, we will publish a list of those teachers who have 100% membership among their families. When you have achieved full membership, please report this to Linda Nakagawa so you may be included in this list!

Concentration; Balance; Listening; Control; Relaxation; Posture: Teaching Pieces Versus Teaching Abilities, Part I

By Karen Hagberg

As Suzuki Piano Basics teachers, I think we always have to be realizing that we are not teaching pieces at all, but that we are utilizing pieces to teach abilities and technique. At the first lesson we are, hopefully, focusing on the ability to sit at the piano and not on the ability to play Twinkle A.

Years of teaching provide us the judgment of when to include another basic ability. In other words, to determine when the sitting is good enough to move on so that we may include holding the arm

and touching keys with the various fingers, and then when to begin playing Twinkle A with these fingers, with the arm above the keyboard and the hand and wrist relaxed, making a good sound.

Along the way, the sitting will deteriorate as the student tries hard to do the next thing. We will need to add a check of the sitting in ready position to every practice the parent is asked to do, so that this aspect of practice becomes routine, so we can focus on another point with the assurance the



Karen Hagberg after International Friendship Concert, Rochester, New York, August 4, 2013. Photo by Suzanne Lichtenstein

sitting is being taken care of. Yet despite these efforts on our part and on the part of the parent, other things will pop up: a raised shoulder, fidgety feet, a finger sticking out. We need constantly to return to the ability to sit in ready position. There are times when it is probably good to assign nothing but ready positions for each finger in each hand to be held for a count of ten (possibly a count of 50 for an advanced student) as an entire week's assignment. Then, doing Down/Ups on single notes can check body relaxation and balance and tone quality. Always we can ask ourselves how we want our students to be sitting when they perform advanced repertoire, how we want their hands to look, what kind of sound we want them to be making. They come to us with natural bodies and open ears. We want to keep them that way. We want to use the pieces to keep them that way.

Dr. Kataoka always said if you can play Book 1 you can play anything. What she meant by that is that most piano technique and ability appears in the Book 1 pieces. If we are careful to teach nothing

but that ability and technique, and to check to see if it is ok in any piece every week, the student will progress naturally and successfully. After a student can execute the Twinkles with good rhythm, tone, and a relaxed body the abilities learned there may be brought into the other pieces. The left hand needs to have technique equal to the right hand, so lots of attention needs to be paid to the left-hand Twinkles, especially with all our right-handed students (i.e. most of them).

Have we taught the Twinkles well enough? No? Then poor student: everything after that will be flawed. This is our job. It is daunting. We may need to attend to the movement of a single finger for many weeks. This is ok if we realize that we are creating the ability to perform advanced repertoire, and that not attending to an unnatural habit will create the inability to perform advanced repertoire.

Miraculously, we will notice that, as the Twinkle technique improves, so does the playing of all the other pieces. The student and parent may be told to learn the right hand of the pieces in Book 1. After a detailed Twinkle lesson, we can listen to these one after another, gently correcting whatever they know, from their Twinkle work, is not good (a finger sticking out, a dropped wrist, a raised shoulder, a weak lower back, the upper body leaning back), all related to the original ability to sit well in ready position. By now, both student and parent know what a good position is, because that has been *the single point of every lesson* for many weeks or even for many months.

Of course, there are other abilities that are to be developed in Book 1, among them: Getting ready and starting on command (concentration); Producing a single, *musical* sound (listening, concentration, control, balance, relaxation); Executing legato, especially with repeated notes (relaxation, listening, control, balance); Musically shaping a phrase with lots of tone on the long, high notes and quiet endings (balance, listening, control); Playing a scale evenly with a relaxed hand above the keyboard (balance, listening, control); Playing chords with taking fingertips (control,

listening, balance); Playing an accompaniment more quietly than the melody (control, listening, balance); Playing an arpeggio using the whole hand on each note (balance, relaxation, listening, control); Maintaining a constant, relaxed position with the entire palm over the keyboard (balance, posture, control).

Imagine how easy it is to teach the Book 2 pieces to a student who has been taught to do all these things. Conversely, we may ask how is it even possible to teach *Ecosaise* to a student who couldn't play measures 7-8 in *Lightly Row* or the ending of *Allegretto 2* with the whole hand on each note of an arpeggio, or to play chords without pushing, or to execute a quiet accompaniment? How is it possible to teach *Short Story* with even and *crescendo/decrescendo* scales, and a quiet, rhythmic, *Do-Sol-Mi-Sol* accompaniment to a child who did not learn to play scales evenly in *Little Playmates* and *Allegretto 2* or to produce beautiful accompaniments in all the Book 1 pieces that have *Do-Sol-Mi-Sol* accompaniments? And so forth. It is

easy to see that ability and technique can deteriorate very quickly if the basic lesson of how to sit in good ready position, how to wait for Go, and how to play the Twinkles well, is not constantly referenced.

This is not the way to learn pieces slowly, this is the way to learn them quickly, contrary to what we might expect. As good technique and ability (concentration, posture, relaxation, balance, control, and listening) are developed and constantly improved, it becomes easier and easier to play pieces. And, think about it, if playing pieces does not become easier as the repertoire gets more difficult, how is a student supposed to do it? Without technique and ability, the students will inevitably hit a brick wall and be unable to execute pieces beyond a certain level. With good technique and ability, nothing stands in their way.

Part 2 next time: The Problem of Students Who Learn Notes Quickly

Sacramento 10-Piano Concert 2014

Register Now! Let's Make This the Best Ever!

Enclosed with this newsletter is a pre-registration form that establishes intent for any students who think they may want to participate in the 10-Piano Concert in August 2014, **deadline November 30**.

Final, committed registration will be **due on January 30** for students who will perform and their teachers. Registration for teachers not bringing students is due on June 30.

Forms for final registration may be requested from Linda Nakagawa (g.nakagawa@comcast.net).



THE ATLANTA AREA
SUZUKI PIANO ASSOCIATION
is pleased to once again host
THE JAPANESE PIANO BASICS WORKSHOP
in Atlanta, Georgia January 30-February 3, 2014
with Master Teachers
Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura from
Matsumoto, Japan.



The 5-day workshop will include lessons and observation for Piano Basics teachers and their students as well as an opportunity for students to apply to perform in The Friendship Concert on stage at the beautiful Spivey Hall on the campus of Clayton State University in Morrow.

Hotel accommodations for out-of-town guests are available and conveniently located near the workshop location at The Steinway Piano Galleries in Alpharetta. Mention Atlanta Suzuki Piano Association to receive the discounted price of \$64/nt. for weekend nights and \$89/nt. for weekday nights. There will be a welcome reception for teachers at the hotel on Wednesday evening, January 29.



12505 Cingular Way
Alpharetta, GA 30004
678-339-0505/Fax: 678-339-0609

For additional information and registration,
please click on
<http://atlantasuzukipiano.org/workshop>
or contact Pamela Smith, Director at
770-457-5144 or
pamelaspianostudio@gmail.com

Piano Basics Foundation Upcoming Workshops/Events

January 17-20, 2014

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop with Leah Brammer
Contact Carole Mayers 610-354-0637
mayerssuzukipiano@verizon.net

July 7-11, 2014

Conway, Arkansas

Suzuki Piano Basics Five Piano
and Chamber Workshop
Contact Pam Werner 501-425-2862
info@suzukiprg.org, www.suzukiprg.org

January 30-February 3, 2014

Atlanta, Georgia

**NOTE START DATE CORRECTED
FROM PREVIOUS NEWSLETTER**

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop
with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura
Contact Pam Smith 770-457-5144
pamelaspianostudio@gmail.com

August 1-16, 2014

Sacramento, California

International 10-Piano Concert
Contact Linda Nakagawa 916-422-2952
g.nakagawa@comcast.net

February 6-10, 2014

Phoenix, Arizona

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop
with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura
Contact Gloria Elliott 623-466-7447
gelliott50@aol.com

April 2015

Matsumoto, Japan

International 10-Piano Concert
Contact Karen Hagberg 585-244-0490
kh@hagbergsuzuki.com



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, 585-244-0490).

*Directory
Update:*

Ellen Jaco

Devrey Cunningham