

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

**Next Deadline: April 15, 2014**

# *Conviction, Basics, Every Single Day*

**By Haruko Kataoka**

From the Matsumoto Suzuki Piano Newsletter  
Vol. 9 No. 1, June 1, 1999  
Translated by Chisa Aoki and  
Teri Paradero  
Edited by Karen Hagberg

God created us from birth with many good essential qualities that enable us to live our lives. I have a feeling, however, that we are also expected to put forth effort on a daily basis.

So many parents are focused on their child's intelligence, and are mainly concerned with school grades. They have forgotten the importance of placing daily effort into some sort of physical activity. Though it is extremely difficult to do something every single day, the act of doing this is a very crucial fundamental basic for human beings.

One of the families in my studio is closely acquainted with a family whose son Ichiro is a famous professional baseball player. They shared with me a story from Ichiro's mother.

Like most mothers, she had high hopes that Ichiro would attend a prominent private middle school and then continue on to a top-ranking university such as Tokyo University. However, in third grade, he announced that he wanted to be a professional baseball player and his mother obliged. From this time until he was a senior in high school, in other words for ten years, they made sure that he practiced the basics of baseball over and over without missing a single day.

The father accompanied him to a batting center every day. Even though he had decided to be a baseball player, being a child, there were days when he just didn't want to practice or would rather be playing a video game.

To help their child realize his dream, the parents provided an environment where he could develop his concentration in baseball. Furthermore, in order to teach their child about keeping a promise, they themselves kept their promises when they agreed to do something for their child. For example, when he asked, "Please wash and iron these," they did it right away.

When Ichiro was a child, he was not only willful and stubborn, he was an extremely picky eater. He was so

obstinate about not eating anything he disliked that his parents always took extra care to prepare at least one dish that he could eat. When he did not do as he was told, however, he was punished.

Ichiro and his brother used to refer to their mother as ogre mom or demon mom. She did not give him any special dispensation from other work or activities because of his time-consuming daily baseball practice. Because of her strong convictions, it did not matter to her if other people thought she was being too strict.

His father muses that the reason why Ichiro can hit any kind of pitch is the result of ten years of consistency, never missing a day of practicing the fundamentals, the basics of baseball.

People who have become highly proficient and famous in their field or career are spectacularly showered with praise and enjoy the limelight, but we cannot forget that in their shadow you will find parents who had the conviction and tenacity adamantly to assure daily accumulation of the basics of their craft.

## ***A New 10-Piano Concert: Please Join Us!***

**By Linda Nakagawa**

The production of the last Suzuki Piano Basics 10-Piano Concert in Sacramento was 3 years ago, August 13, 2011. Three years is a long enough time to get out of sync. So it was during the 10-Piano Concert this past April, 2013 in Japan that I realized that we really had to start getting things rolling again. Rehearsals in Matsumoto inspire me to think about the pieces we could perform. However, every time a piece was suggested to me or would pop into my head, my initial reaction was always, "oh, that's too difficult." This perception not only applied to the last pieces of the program, I felt this way about every piece, from the Twinkles on! Then there was the logistical part of getting everyone on board again. Just thinking about it was overwhelming!

But I am happy to say, right at this moment, *I am so excited*. I am mostly thrilled that the students participating will be able to make new friends while working earnestly, intensely and energetically under the guidance of the Japanese teachers. And that the Suzuki Piano Basics teachers observing will learn so much too. It is both amazing and impressive to watch the Japanese teachers work with the students. It is truly an art!

*To register to attend rehearsals, contact Linda Nakagawa: [g.nakagawa@comcast.net](mailto:g.nakagawa@comcast.net). For inexpensive housing, Google Airbnb Sacramento. Find us on Social Media: Twitter: @TenPianoConcert or <http://twitter.com/TenPianoConcert>; Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/TenPianoConcert>.*

# *Why Do I Feel So Moved?*

By Haruko Kataoka

From the Matsumoto Suzuki Piano Newsletter

Vol. 9 No. 1, June 1, 1999

Translated by Chisa Aoki and

Teri Paradero

Edited by Karen Hagberg

A mother recently shared, "This is the third 10-Piano Concert I have attended, but why I am still moved to tears listening to children play even the easy, beginners' pieces?"

The answer is simple. Children do not possess the drive that we adults have. If children have been taught to play with natural technique, they can perform without unnecessary tension or worry because of their indifference toward gain and their lack of ambition.

Practicing with great effort enables children to put their heart and soul into performing, apart from any worries or concerns, with intense concentration. Thus they are able to communicate directly through their sound. The audience listens to this heartfelt sound and is therefore deeply moved. This pure heart-to-heart communication through sound is what moves us to tears.

Granted from the heavens at birth, children have the ability to be natural and, without exception, they are able to be free from obstructive thoughts, to be in that state of innocence called *mushin* in Japanese. It is exactly because of this egoless state, or selflessness, however, that it is unthinkable to

expect children to practice on their own. Practicing for children requires the help of adults.

Performances by the great masters work exactly the same way. Their virtuoso performances are wonderful because they play with natural technique devoid of any useless or wasted movement, free from tension. The people in the audience, regardless of how distracted they may be, come away refreshed by this wholehearted performance, having been bestowed with the joy of listening to music. The masters all started out as innocent children with no selfish ambition. With time they became ambitious adults with the requisite concerns and the suffering that comes with life. They are people who studied hard and, with the power of their own effort, recaptured that state of freedom without tension. As adults they have trained their bodies and their minds to recapture that same state of *mushin* that children have.

As humans living our lives, what is happiness? The exact instant we are able to feel, no matter what the emotion. Isn't that what life is all about?

# Practice Tips from a Mom

**By Sally Bacchetta (mother of Erin Bacchetta, age 9,  
student of Karen Hagberg, Rochester, New York)**

At some point in one of our daughter's "I hate piano" moods, I stopped reacting and began reflecting. *She used to love playing piano. When and how had it become drudgery for her?* After some serious thought and discussion my husband and I realized that our focus on Twinkle practice, correct fingering, and proper posture – although important – had drained the magic from the music, and it was the magic that had attracted her in the first place. *Every time we sat down at the piano together we were telling her what she had to do. Her spirit of carefree musical exploration had been crushed by our endless correction. Fix your fingering. Take, take, take every note. Don't crash your endings. Stay above the keys. Sit up!* No wonder piano felt like a chore to her. We had made it that way!

What follows are seven strategies we found over time. I hope you will share what works for you.

**Show, don't tell:** One evening when my daughter tired of me saying, "Keep your hands over the keys" and I tired of her insisting that they were (they weren't), I grabbed my cell phone and started filming... zoomed right in on her hands and the piano keys. When she had finished I silently handed her my phone and watched her watch the video. Without a word she re-played the piece with her hands in proper position, then turned to me and said, "Mom, I really thought my hands were over the keys all those other times." I believe she did think that, and therein lies the power of showing rather than telling.

**Praise effort, not outcome:** We don't try to predict what our daughter will do with her

musical training. She's doing it now. She's developing discipline, persistence, patience, and self-control. She's discovering the merits of preparation, a positive attitude, and clear communication. She's learning how to take correction, direction, *and* praise. These things are more difficult than playing music, and they serve her well in other areas of her life. So, while we celebrate with her each time she masters a new passage or piece, we praise her most for putting forth effort.

**Choice is earned:** My daughter and I have different ideas on the best time for her daily practice. Our solution: If she is engaged and cooperative during today's practice with me, she gets to choose her practice time for tomorrow. If she is resistant and complaining today, I choose her practice time for tomorrow. Choice is earned. Or not.

**Freestyle:** We feed her creativity by letting her play "freestyle" either one entire practice session a week or a portion of each practice session. Freestyle is anything she wants it to be. She composes, performs, rocks out, returns to Book 1, plays duets with the CD... whatever makes her feel good about playing the piano.

**Tag Team:** When my daughter and I are going on Day 9 of locking horns over the piano, I step out and Dad steps in. Cue the sunrise, glitter hearts, and scampering unicorns. The same child who refuses to play a single note with me will often skip gaily through her entire repertoire with good posture and a beautiful tone... for Daddy.

**Be a "bad" student:** One of my daughter's favorite things is to role-play Piano Teacher to

my Bad Student. I slump. I slouch. I cross my feet. I sit way back from the piano with my wrists down and my fingers barely on the keys. I rush, I poke, and I skip repeats. The worse I play the more earnestly she corrects me. And when it's her turn, wow! She does so many things right!

**Let it ride:** I firmly believe that sometimes the best we can do as parents, is endure. The roller-coaster plunge from a "good" week to a "bad" week can be so intense that I wonder if my happy, collaborative darling has disappeared forever, and this irritable, emotional, contrary little person is here to stay. I have learned to let it ride. As difficult as it is, I back off. I pray. I cry. I keep my doubts to

myself, and ultimately, I trust her piano teacher to do what I cannot; to have patience when mine has run out; to melt the iron will with calm persistence; to see the big picture; to show us the way; to endure. And she does, every time.

The underlying theme here is to encourage you to feel the magic as often as possible. Children feel it and produce it naturally. For parents working with our children in music, it is most easily accomplished by offering freedom and choice within limits. Give your child freedom to make choices within the limits you set. You may both be surprised by what happens.

## Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation Directory: Changes and Corrections

Carolyn Barrett  
Brooke Chumachenko  
Dawn Price Flewellen  
Mei Ihara  
Janet Miller

## ***Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Workshops, February 2014***



Teachers attending the Atlanta Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop, January 30-February 4, 2014. Front Row (L to R): Keiko Ogiwara, Kathie Sheeley, Kellie Ladipo, Elizabeth Sherk, Eloise Sanders, Leah Brammer, Pamela Smith. Back Row: Keiko Kawamura, Marche Altom, Jacqueline Graham, Barbara Brown, Paula Soller, Nancy Lewis, Chisa Aoki, Bruce Boiney, Hannah Hall. Not pictured: Brooke Chumachenko, Lauretta Russell & Robin Blankenship. Photo by Ken Matsuda.



Following the Friendship Concert at the Phoenix Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop, February 4-10, 2014. From L to R: Mei Ihara, Rae Kate Shen, Keiko Kawamura, Dianne Densmore, Jacki Block, Vicki Merley, Keiko Ogiwara, Ellen Jacob, Angela Jacob, Linda Carrier, Ann Taylor, Kathy Huseby, Tanya Matsuda. Not pictured: Shirlee Rickman, Rita Burns, Lori Armstrong, Linda Nakagawa, Nancy Thornhill, Jill Austin, Renee Eckis, Carol Novak, Connie Snyder, and Gloria Elliott. Photo by Ken Matsuda.

# *The Problem of Students Who Learn Notes Quickly: Teaching Pieces Versus Teaching Abilities, Part II*

By Karen Hagberg

In the first part of this article (in the November/December 2013 issue), I discussed the importance of teaching the Basics of Concentration, Balance, Listening, Control, Relaxation, and Posture in Book 1 in some detail. Teaching these things requires repetition, and lots of it. It helps if the student takes a long time to learn the notes of the pieces because, during the time it takes to learn the notes, we have time for that repetition. We have time to educate the parent to become skilled at carrying out the repetition at home. We have time, in other words, to teach the student (and the parent) how to practice, how to listen with concentration, how to establish and maintain the best, most natural, use of the body.

This is why I have come to realize that our “slow” students are the easiest to teach, and that our “fast” students can represent the biggest challenge we face as teachers. This is totally opposite from what I was led to believe by traditional colleagues when I began teaching. They always touted, and took credit for, the “talented” students who moved quickly through repertoire, and these same teachers complained bitterly about the slower, “untalented” students, as if they could do nothing to help them. They gave up on the slower students from the beginning.

I instinctively knew that there was something wrong with this thinking, and my instincts were confirmed when I was first introduced to Dr. Kataoka’s ideas. Since then, I have operated in a teaching world where my

thinking is totally opposite that of my traditional colleagues. Living in a city with one of the world’s great music conservatories, I find myself surrounded by traditional thought about piano pedagogy. For decades by now, I have had to struggle to maintain my own commitment to Suzuki Piano Basics in this sea of opposing views.

I must constantly ask myself, What do I want for my students by the time they leave my studio? Dr. Kataoka’s simple answer to this question was: I want them *not* to be deaf to tone and *not* to be so physically crippled at the piano that they cannot pursue piano at a more advanced level if they so choose without injuring themselves. These may seem like simple goals, but let us not trivialize them. They are far from trivial, and yet they are not considered at all by teachers who judge their students’ progress on the rate at which they learn repertoire.

Think about it. Students who learn pieces quickly, especially very young students, are praised by all the adults around them. They are encouraged to go ahead and learn the next piece and the next and the next. We have all seen by now the so-called child prodigies on television and the internet who can bang out pieces with all kinds of musical feeling and energy, but who are producing terrible sound with stiff bodies. Most everyone thinks they are wonderful (and of course, they truly are wonderful children with natural musical feeling), but meanwhile nobody is teaching them what is important about playing the

piano. Where will that kind of sound and that stiff body take the poor little person? We who have the responsibility of teaching them must ask ourselves this question every day.

Even within groups of Suzuki Piano Basics teachers, I sometimes hear teachers marveling at how quickly a student is going through repertoire. Wow, a 4-year-old who has gone through Book 1 in under a year! But did the teacher have time to teach the basics of Concentration, Balance, Listening, Control, Relaxation, and Posture to that child, and to the parent, before careening into Book 2? It is not an impossible thing to do in under a year, but it certainly is not easy. In my experience, it takes the better part of two years, minimum, to prepare most student well for Book 2. The poor students who come into Book 2 ill-prepared will flounder way too long in the beginning of that book. Ironically, so many teachers have had the experience of students having trouble in the beginning of Book 2 that it has been suggested that an interim book be provided to make the transition easier! But we know that a student who has been given the Basics in Book 1 will have no trouble at all going into more advanced repertoire as long as the Basics are reinforced constantly along the way. This brings us to our problem. The student learns the notes to a piece, right hand, left hand, and hands together, and can play the piece from beginning to end without note mistakes and without stopping. Most students, and parents, will feel done with the piece at this point and will want to move on to the next one. How do we teachers make it possible for them to take the time to practice the important Basics that they will inevitably overlook as they are learning notes? It seems obvious that this is what we must do, but it is really difficult with the students who are

learning notes quickly. When they are ready to work on Basics for one piece, they have probably learned the next piece or two (or three). It is difficult for the teacher herself not to be impressed with a student's ability to forge ahead like this. It is difficult for the teacher to insist on correct practice when the student and the parent do not understand what is lacking. After all, doesn't their child play "better" than the other, slower students in the studio?

It is our job as teachers to point out to such students what is lacking, even though the pieces, on the surface, appear to flow correctly and musically. It is a constant struggle not to give in and to let the floodgates open, allowing the student to forge ahead at a breakneck speed. The student and parent need to be educated, at every lesson, to appreciate what it means to make a good sound with a natural body, and to minimize the ability simply to play lots of notes in the correct order. Personally, I find this my most difficult teaching. I now fully understand what I did not comprehend at all when I first arrived in Japan and saw Dr. Kataoka happily and calmly praising students who moved slowly and, conversely, becoming angry and impatient with just about every note played by the fast-moving ones. I didn't understand this *at all* at first.

I have written about this issue before. It preoccupies me because I see students all the time who are playing beyond their capability, students who began their study with good sound and relaxed bodies who go on to develop stiffness and to produce harsh sound. I have had students go to other teachers because I do not let them play pieces their friends are playing. I have come to dread lessons with some students who require so



very much work on my part. I would rather teach with more room around the repertoire so I can devote time to all the various issues each new piece brings with it. I come right out and tell students that if all they want to do is to bang and crash through pieces they have no need to come to me. I quote Dr. Kataoka: Anyone can learn to play the notes of a piece if they really want to, and how to make the piece sound like beautiful music is another thing altogether.

Fast-moving students seem to need strict teaching for a very long time. No matter how advanced my students become, they still manage to violate the Basics that I have been teaching from the beginning. They crash into phrase endings. They lose tone as they ascend scales and gain it coming down. They play *down* when they should be playing *up* and vice

versa. They play chords with stiff fingertips. They play accompaniments louder than melodies. They ignore fingerings and articulations. It seems I must teach these things over and over again *especially* to the faster-moving students. As Dr. Kataoka always said: Smart students learn quickly, but they forget just as quickly. What a frustration! Meanwhile, everyone but me is telling them they are “talented,” that their playing is “beautiful,” (when it clearly is not), and that they are the best among their peers.

Yes, I finally understand what I saw when I looked over at Dr. Kataoka after one of her students performed Liszt’s *La Campanella*. While everyone else in the audience was clapping wildly, she was slumped down in her seat, face in her hands, shaking her head. For a moment, I thought she was going to cry.



# ***Piano Basics Foundation***

## ***Upcoming Workshops/Events***

**July 7-11, 2014**

### **Conway, Arkansas**

Suzuki Piano Basics Five Piano  
and Chamber Workshop

Contact Pam Werner [501-425-2862](tel:501-425-2862)  
[info@suzukiprg.org](mailto:info@suzukiprg.org), [www.suzukiprg.org](http://www.suzukiprg.org)

**August 1-16, 2014**

### **Sacramento, California**

Suzuki Piano Basics  
International 10-Piano Concert

Contact Linda Nakagawa 916-422-2952  
[g.nakagawa@comcast.net](mailto:g.nakagawa@comcast.net)

**July 18-21, 2014**

### **Tacoma, Washington**

Suzuki Piano Basics Summer Festival  
with Rae Kate Shen

Contact Jacki Block 253-759-7213  
[Jblock@ups.edu](mailto:Jblock@ups.edu)

**February 5-9, 2015**

### **Orange County, California**

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop  
with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura

Contact Mei Ihara 714-997-8692  
[mihara@socal.rr.com](mailto:mihara@socal.rr.com)

**July 21-25, 2014**

### **Louisville, Kentucky**

Louisville Suzuki Piano Basics Institute  
University of Louisville

Contact Bruce Boiney 502-241-5921  
[boiney@suzukipiano.com](mailto:boiney@suzukipiano.com)  
[www.suzukipiano.org](http://www.suzukipiano.org)

**April 2015**

### **Matsumoto, Japan**

Suzuki Piano Basics  
International 10-Piano Concert

Contact Karen Hagberg 585-978-0600  
[kh@hagbergsuzuki.com](mailto: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](mailto:kh@hagbergsuzuki.com), 585-978-0600).

**Suzuki Piano Basics Web Site and discussion group:**

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