

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

The Body Is Important!

By Haruko Kataoka

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Next Deadline: October 15, 2015

One day I just happened to turn the TV on and watched some of the Super Giant Slalom coverage at the Lillehammer Winter Olympics. I was just amazed. What a competition! I was struck by the differences of speed among the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd- place winners. They compete with scores that differ by fractions of seconds (1st place at 1' 32.53", 2nd place at 1' 32.61", and 3rd place at 1' 32.93"). Furthermore, the course itself is grueling, achieving speeds of over an amazing 60 mi./hr. Isn't it beyond the limits of human ability to slide down such extreme slopes while maneuvering abrupt turns and winning by just hundredths of a second?

In order to prevent a fall, the body must be absolutely relaxed in order to absorb the shock of the skis' contact with the ground. Total balance of the body must be achieved without any unnecessary movement or tension. A mere one- to two- centimeter mistake in any direction can send the body off balance, adding time to the score. This event is totally unforgiving of even an infinitesimal amount of tension in the body for the entire duration of the race.

To achieve the best balance, you must secure that one sweet spot in the inner body, your center of gravity, and then to ensure that the body does not have unnecessary tension. This is true whenever the body is used to do any task. However, the entire time the athletes are skiing, they must

have the psychological strength to maintain this center gravity. Every athlete's life is in peril during this challenge. These athletes possess magnificent power.

When I observe such events, it always brings me back to my realization that such psychological and physical involvement are exactly the same when children are learning how to play the piano. Why then don't piano teachers take teaching seriously?

In the world of a sport that involves traveling 60 miles/hour and winning by a hundredth of a second, there is no room for cheating. Rather, it demands total adherence to a natural relaxed body with absolute balance. Non-adherence to the physics of this sport results in certain death. If serious thought is given to exactly how one must use the body to achieve success in any endeavor, we come to realize that there is only one way.

Because what one does at the piano does not have dire consequences compared to

such an exacting sport, many different methods in piano instruction exist; people just teach however they like. This irresponsible attitude toward teaching piano robs children of the freedom and naturalness of their bodies. It is unfortunate that, unlike in the world of extreme sport, the resulting harm is not so obvious or understandable.

In our present society, mothers hope their children are intelligent or that they receive perfect grades in school. However, it takes more than just intellect to be able to continue to live. When we are born, we are bestowed by God with a physical body that we must live with for the rest of our lives. This is the reason why it is really important to figure out how to use our bodies. Musical sense is also bestowed upon us at birth. Furthermore, because Suzuki Method parents provide good musical environment, children eventually develop a good musicality. We do not need to worry that children will not be musical. However, both teachers and students together must research how to use the body in the most natural and wonderful way. We must work to assure that children acquire what is the best natural way to use the body while they are young.

We have to view the issue of the body as important. Let us stay in line with the world of sports in researching the body: posture, the way to use the fingers, and the efficient use of the weight of the body to produce musical tone.

Thinking About How to Use the Body

By Keiko Ogiwara

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June 30, 2015

Translated by Chisa Aoki and

Teri Paradero

Edited by Karen Hagberg

I was watching a broadcast of figure skaters practicing their spins on TV and saw them fall on their bottoms over and over on ice, a very hard surface. I could just about feel the pain and I was only watching them on TV. According to athlete Mao Asada, skaters practice [these maneuvers] a hundred times a day. It is evident from just watching them that even a little unnecessary tension results in a mistake.

It is times like this that I remember Haruko Kataoka Sensei often saying to me, "When practicing the piano, you can't injure yourself no matter how off balance you are. It's not a life and death situation so no one takes it seriously." Then she would follow with, "However, it is as if being gradually poisoned by arsenic; fatigue is stored and accumulates in the body."

When Haruko Kataoka Sensei was young, everyone around her would laud her piano playing. However, she found playing the piano very difficult. She felt frantic and did not enjoy playing at all. When she went to see great pianists in concert, they played with such great ease that they looked as if they could have been humming along while playing. Her discovery that

there was a problem with her own playing was the basic impetus for her research into the best method of piano playing. This research was a lifelong quest for Sensei.

There was a time when I could only afford one grand piano. For a short interval, I taught on an upright and my students had their lessons on the grand. Because the construction of the upright was not right for my body, I became very exhausted. When we are in physical contact with a musical instrument, it becomes an extension of our body. For the sake of my body I had to purchase another grand.

Having spent many decades facing the piano mostly every day, it is a deeply curious issue that, depending on my physical condition, I might feel that the height of my bench needs to change from the day before or perhaps feel that my sound quality is different.

As we accumulate many years of facing the piano daily, it is extremely important that we think about how we use our bodies so we can actually enjoy performing.

Speech at the Conclusion of the International Friendship Concert

August 3, 2015, Rochester, New York

By Keiko Ogiwara

I am happy to be here in Rochester to be able to study with everyone. While teaching, I noticed how many beginners you have this time.

When children begin music education they are able to develop concentration and perseverance. Basics are very important in piano study.



Keiko Ogiwara, International Friendship Concert, Rochester, NY, August 3, 2015. Photo by Chong Koh.

Our mentor, Kataoka Sensei, told us about the time she was questioned by the founder of Suzuki Method, Shinichi Suzuki. He wanted to know if piano teachers have ever thought about one single tone. This prompted her to start researching a method for piano instruction based on sound. So

she recorded her own sound by playing many different ways. By listening to her recording, she came to many realizations about sound.

Having worked on the Twinkles with many students during our workshop, we learn how to sit properly with good posture by using the Twinkles. In the beginning, students play slowly but eventually they are able to play as well as the Twinkles on the recording.

Just playing the Twinkles well once is not good enough. Continuing to work on the Twinkles and improving them over time, our goal is to play them better with each and every practice. In other words, playing the Twinkles better today than yesterday.

Bad posture and bad playing as a beginner will not improve without accumulating good practice. We cannot think that when students become advanced they will automatically be able to play well.

Those of you who are advanced students, you must continue to use the Twinkles and Down-Ups to improve each sound in order to polish your piece into beautiful music.

Students who study Piano Basics are said to have good posture and produce beautiful tone. Please keep working. I look forward to hearing your performance filled with even better tone next time I see you.

Sacramento International Suzuki Piano Basics 10-Piano Concert 2016

ATTENTION ALL TEACHERS WHO POSSIBLY HAVE A STUDENT OR STUDENTS WISHING TO PERFORM IN THIS UPCOMING EVENT: Please contact Linda Nakagawa g.nakagawa@comcast.net with the name and age of the student, along with his/her most recent polished piece. Expressing interest at this time is not a formal commitment, but will help with the planning of the program. The concert will be held on Sunday, August 14, 2016, and rehearsals for out-of-town students begin on Saturday, July 30. Look forward to seeing you there.

How to Plan Your Way to a Teacher Research Workshop

By Rae Kate Shen

You know those "bucket lists" that we all ought to have? Well, here is one to add to that bucket list many times over: **Attend a workshop taught by the Japanese teachers from Matsumoto!** If ever there is a worthwhile experience, this is it. No words can truly express how valuable, motivating and amazing one of these workshops can be. It must be experienced. So, here is how I get myself to a teacher workshop year after year.

Step 1 – I schedule a week off in my yearly teaching schedule *at the beginning* of the teaching year, letting students know that the dates off will be announced at a later time.

Step 2 – I start my teaching year early by doing "make-ups" for this time off ahead of time or schedule a time of the year when I plan to do them.

Step 3 - Once a workshop date is announced in the Piano Basics Newsletter or I hear about it by word of mouth, I *MARK it down* in my yearly planner.

Step 4 – I start to *SAVE, SAVE, SAVE* as if for a rainy day. I go to out to eat one time less a week or month, go meatless once a week, save loose change in a jar, etc. (Any other ideas on how to save for a workshop? I welcome your email to me at raekshen@ymail.com to consolidate and

pass on!)

Step 5 – I ask for time off from my other job.

Step 6 – I start looking for airfare sales. I receive alerts from www.Airfarewatchdog.com when prices drop. (I got a \$98 round trip airfare with Southwest for an August 2015 workshop in Sacramento.)

Step 7 – I contact a close relative or friend in the workshop area (or even a long lost one!) and inquire about a possible home stay with them at the time of the workshop. If you do not know anyone, ask the workshop coordinator about possible home stays or potential roommates for hotel stay. Either would be considerably less expensive than going solo.

Step 8 – I *sign up and reserve my spot* as soon as registration forms come out. I've come this far, why not commit myself completely?!

Step 9 – I *PASS the word* on to other potential Suzuki teachers. All are welcome!

Step 10 – Now I can start anticipating an exciting time with old and new colleagues alike, making wonderful, lasting friendships along the way!



Keiko Kawamura and Keiko Ogiwara, Rochester, NY, August 2015. Photo by Patricia Palmintier-Pritchard.

So what about those of you who have already crossed off “Attend a Teacher workshop with the Japanese Teachers” from your bucket list? The answer is, now add: “Attend Teacher workshops with the Japanese Teachers on a regular basis.” Why? Well, sometimes many of us think we “got the concepts” after attending one workshop. But did we truly get everything? Did we understand the points made and are we applying them in our teaching consistently?

Furthermore, have our students been showing a change for the better? Many times, at the conclusion of a workshop, we are fired up and excited to go home to start implementing what we have learned. But as time passes, we naturally forget the amazing tone we heard demonstrated, the patient repetitions when getting the point across to students, the exciting proof that indeed, children do try hard to change and succeed in what is asked of them. Therefore,

it is vital that we continue to attend these workshops on a consistent basis. Doing so offers several benefits:

1. We get five days of good tone and exemplary teaching modeled by the Japanese Teachers. Not only do we begin hearing differences in qualities of tone, but our level of listening comprehension becomes higher as well.
2. We get to hear the same points repeated over and over again, some we may have missed at previous workshops. At every workshop I have attended, there has always been an “Aha moment” where the lightbulb has finally switched on for one point I have heard repeatedly but just now understand in a deeper way.
3. We get to meet like-minded colleagues who are seeking the same goals and standards of excellence for their students, becoming part of a familial community. It was mentioned at the last Teacher workshop that in Japan there is nothing similar to the 5-day workshops we have here in the United States. We are indeed fortunate to have these events where anyone and everyone has the opportunity to learn and research together in a safe, encouraging environment.
4. Finally, we ultimately get better in our own teaching and communication with our Suzuki families. This in itself is what excites and motivates me to continue attending year after year.

Once you find yourself back at a workshop again, be sure to be present 100% of the time for maximum benefit in body, mind, and spirit. If you are there all five days, you will get a clearer picture of what it means to teach our students to that higher standard of excellence.

Let’s all try our best to attend the next teacher workshop [in February 2016, see Upcoming

Events], or if you cannot go, donate to a scholarship fund to send a new or next-generation Suzuki teacher. Better yet, bring a student with you to have a lesson and/or participate in the next Friendship Concert. Not

only will you continue giving your students the very best your teaching has to offer, but it will also help growing this wonderful, worthwhile community of Suzuki Piano Teachers into future generations.



Rae Kate Shen. Photo by First United Methodist Church of Redlands.

Rae Kate Shen, a Suzuki Piano Basics teacher in Redlands, California, was elected Secretary of the Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation at our General Membership Meeting in July. Immediately upon her election, she made a generous donation to the Foundation to kick-start a scholarship program for teachers who want to pursue Suzuki Piano Basics training with teachers from Japan. Details of the scholarship program will be forthcoming after consideration of our Board of Directors. We are truly indebted to Rae Kate for her generosity and vision for our future. Thank you



Archival Suzuki Video Now Available

Do any of you old-timers recall a video of Dr. Suzuki giving a demonstration at the Talent Education Institute in Matsumoto in which he, among other things, stood behind a 5-year-old pianist while she played the Bach *Gigue* from Book 4 along with a recording? He would clap his hands randomly during her performance, and she was able to stop whenever he clapped, and then come in with the recording when he clapped again. He did this several times during the performance. On this same video, a six-year-old plays the Mozart Turkish Rondo, and there are several group performances by young violinists (including playing with the bow held at the wrong end, an exercise Dr. Suzuki used often in his teaching).



Carol Wunderle, the teacher who formats this newsletter for our web site and who is now working with Professor Ken Wilburn on the Kataoka Archive, transcribing the interpreters' translations of Dr. Kataoka's words so that we may read them as we watch the videos, reports that a former student of hers went on to Graduate School, studied Suzuki Piano Method, and brought the video to her attention. It was after seeing this

demonstration, Carol reports, "I left my University Position and all traditional piano teaching and have been teaching Suzuki Piano ever since."

This video is now available on the Kataoka Archive for all to see, along with 30 new teaching videos, and there will be more to come. To access the demonstration, go to:

<https://mediasite.ecu.edu/MS/Catalog/catalogs/suzukipianobasics>

and use the password: HKataokaSPBF.

Search the videos by title and go to "Shinichi Suzuki Presentation." It is 45 minutes long, and the piano portion will be found at 22' and runs until 35'. Young teachers may be inspired by this as so many of us were thirty years ago.

And we hope that, viewing this amazing archive, many of you will be inspired to search your attic (and possibly the attics of former students) for Kataoka lesson videos you may have collected over the years. Instead of deteriorating, they will be preserved for posterity. The more videos in the Archive, the more valuable it becomes, and we urge all of our members to contribute whatever you have. Videos on all formats are skillfully digitalized by Media Department of Professor Wilburn's university, East Carolina University, and we owe them a huge debt of gratitude for doing this work for the Suzuki Piano Basics community. Please label, as much as you can, the date and place that the video was made. Student lessons, not teacher lessons, will appear online. Students will not be identified. Send videos to:

Professor Kenneth Wilburn
History Department, Brewster A318
East Carolina University
East Fifth Street
Greenville, North Carolina 27858-4353

Carol Wunderle is currently looking for a person or persons who are able and willing to translate Dr. Suzuki's words on this video. If you can help, please contact Carol at carol@pianopathway.com. Thank you! Note: Following this writing Teri Peradero and Chisa Aoki have so kindly accepted to do this work.

Piano Basics Foundation ***Upcoming Workshops/Events***

October 4-6, 2015

Omaha, Nebraska

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop
with Bruce Anderson
Contact Carol Novak 402-572-0105
carolnovak@cox.net

February 11-15, 2016

Orange County, California

Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop
with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura
Contact Mei Ihara 714-997-8692
mihara14@att.net

November 6-9, 2015

Atlanta, Georgia

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop
with Bruce Anderson
Contact Kathie Sheeley 404-384-5650
kathiesheeley@icloud.com

July 30-August 14, 2016

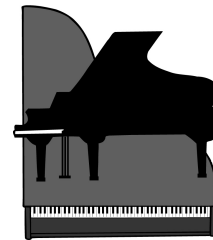
Sacramento, California

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

February 3-7, 2016

Phoenix, Arizona

Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research
Workshop
with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura
Contact Gloria Elliott 623-466-7447
Gelliott50@aol.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, 585-978-0600).

Suzuki Piano Basics Web Site and discussion group:

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