

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

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What Dr. Shinichi Suzuki Taught Us!

By Haruko Kataoka

From the Matsumoto Suzuki Piano Newsletter
Vol. 7 No 10, March 3, 1998
Translated by Chisa Aoki and
Teri Paradero
Edited by Karen Hagberg

On January 26, 1998, Dr. Suzuki entered his eternal sleep, having lived to the fullest his natural lifespan of 99 years. I met Dr. Suzuki in 1955. He was just turning 60, but in great health. Ten years after World War II, several culturally minded people from Matsumoto welcomed Dr. Suzuki from Kisofukushima to establish the Talent Education Institute. Many violin teachers who followed Dr. Suzuki's teachings gathered in Matsumoto. Day after day, he was busy with a substantial schedule of lessons for teachers, teacher trainers, and his own students. All these lessons were held in Asahimachi. Our *kaikan* where lessons are held now was built ten years later.

Shinichi Suzuki's thoughts such as, "Any child can be developed, it depends on how you do it," "A child's success is not about his talent, more importantly it is what is in his environment," "It is only by listening to a lot of music, as much as hearing one's mother tongue, that one can perform with complete mastery and freedom,"

were also adopted by teachers in America. Many musicians and educators from foreign countries came to visit. With every visitor came an opportunity to enjoy a wonderful concert in his home. It just seems like yesterday that such memorable events happened.

In the beginning, for about two to three years, I commuted almost every day to his home. It was truly a happy time. I was always allowed to observe any and every lesson. At tea time, he would share his reminiscences. Sometimes he would take us out to eat. We had badminton matches in his backyard. Sometimes we would go out to play ping pong.

Those many enjoyable activities were unforgettable, but the most important things I learned were, “Basics are important,” “Always aim to study the best in the world,” and “This education is not about developing musicians, it is education to develop the human being.”

At that time, I was young and battling with questions about the why and wherefore of playing the piano and of teaching, I realized then that it was connected to the question of what we as human beings are living for. All questions were resolved upon meeting Dr. Suzuki. Violin was not my instrument. The piano being my

instrument, I set my heart on doing with the piano what Dr. Suzuki did with the violin. For the last forty years, it has been my intention to follow in his footsteps, little by little.

Four years ago on the last day of the conference in Toyohashi (near Nagoya), he stood in front of a large audience of teachers and said, “Everyone please study the Twinkles more earnestly.” I think these were the last words he spoke in public.

For the last forty years, whether it was a beginner or advanced student, what he taught was the same: how to produce musical tone that rings with beautiful and heartfelt sound.

Music must originate from having natural, beautiful, musical sound. We can truly begin our journey only after we produce this sound. We must never forget what he meant about the Twinkles. It is not merely the tune but we use it as a tool to study the basic principals of music.

This is the precious teaching that Dr. Suzuki bequeathed to us.

I think we have the responsibility to convey all the things Dr. Suzuki taught us to the next generation. Dr. Suzuki, we truly thank you!

Everyone Please Take Care of Your Posture

By Haruko Kataoka

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There are two sisters who come to study with me in my studio. They are quite slender and tall. They are a bit laid back about practice. Perhaps it is partially because they have to commute quite a distance to come for lessons.

Recently, I noticed that their posture when playing the piano had greatly improved. So I commented, "Your posture has improved so much. Your mother must be helping to remind you about your posture while you are practicing."

The mother immediately interrupted, "You have always told us that we must have good posture not only when playing the piano but while doing daily activities. You also told us that, in both the West and in Japan, studies have revealed that proper posture helps digestion and absorption of

nutrients, I have been strict about posture whenever we are eating."

I was simply telling them what a great job they were doing with their piano practice. This took me by surprise, but in that moment, I realized what a wonderful thing this was. The older sister is in middle school. Japanese children in middle school (come to think of it, also children in grade school) not only have homework from school, they attend coaching or 'cram' school. There just isn't enough opportunity to practice piano every day. So whether or not they have tests in school or mountains of homework, they still have to eat morning and night at home. When care is given to posture during mealtimes at home, this is added opportunity to repeat the practice of good posture and therefore, to acquire the ability to have good posture at all times. Everyone, please try adopting this practice.

The Importance of Taking Your Time

By Karmalita Bawar

Our behavior as a society has certainly changed in the past century. There was a time when communication was written by hand and sent by post, opened, read, digested, and consciously considered. There was a time when you purchased the music you wanted to listen to, and you listened intentionally to the record player. There was a time when people were thoughtful, mindful, and manners mattered.

Each generation seems more relaxed and yet more stretched for time than the one before. Information can be retrieved almost instantly. Suits are no longer required on the job. Food arrives fast and complete. Communication is made via short texts, using even shorter acronyms instead of complete sentences. It is as if time is running out, and everything must happen sooner rather than later.

Surprisingly, there has been a turnaround. We see hints of it in the food production industry as farmer's markets spring up in urban settings. We prefer the alchemy of coffee that is ground and brewed in artisan shops and cafés. This return to the old ways may be ushering a new and subtle renaissance. It occurred to me recently that the 20's will soon be

back again. It would be lovely if jazz, cabaret, multi-layered dresses, single stitching, and hats became the fashionable trend. Can you imagine?

Then maybe, just maybe, we would slow down. Consider the counterbalance to our



Karmalita Bawar teaching at Louisville Suzuki Piano Basics Institute, June 2016.

busy, multi-tasking lives. We would teach our children to take their time.

It was a privilege to teach again at the Suzuki Piano Institute in Louisville, Kentucky this year. In addition, I recently had a surgical procedure, which makes walking rather slow-going for me. Imagine this scenario: I was walking to the parking lot behind the music school, and on either side of me I had the fine company of

Bruce "A" and Bruce "B" (many of us Piano Basics teachers refer to them with great fondness as "A" or "B" as a way to distinguish between Anderson and Boiney). As we chatted, Bruce B walked at his normal, brisk pace. Bruce A walked a little slower than the former. I lagged behind so as not to appear limping. Bruce A noticed my gait and slowed his pace. Bruce B noticed and slowed even more. At this point, while we walked quite a bit slower, but together, Bruce A commented on how much more we are able to notice when we take our time. He pointed out the grass; the berries on the feeble trees we passed under; the blue summer sky which was so bright and clear. Bruce A said something along the line "during a

time when children are under stress to find the time to get everything done, isn't it wonderful that we teach them how to slow down and take their time?" Bruce B paused and commented on the profound truth in this idea. I nodded in agreement. That entire week I taught and I thought about taking my time.

Please, everyone, let's take our time. It's so easy to get distracted, so be present in the lesson. Notice the littlest things. Pay attention or you may miss the gem or miracle that we teachers are trying to get the students to achieve! Let's all teach the next generation that taking time is important.

International Suzuki Piano Basics 10-Piano Concert, 2017 Matsumoto, Japan

The 2017 10-Piano Concert in Matsumoto will be held on Sunday, April 30, 2017. The teachers in Japan are again welcoming members of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation as participants and observers to attend the full 15 days of rehearsal leading up to the big event. All teachers are welcome to attend as observers, and teachers who have attended previous 10-Piano Concerts and who, along with their student, have had recent lessons with teachers from Japan, may apply to bring their student to participate in the concert.

Attending teachers and students from the U.S. and Canada will leave on Thursday, April 13 and leave from Narita on Monday, May 1. Parents of performing students may not accompany their children to Matsumoto, but are welcome to arrive a day or two before the concert.

Registration materials and all other information may be requested from Karen Hagberg kh@hagbergsuzuki.com.

CALLING FOR SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS!

Summer workshops and Ten-Piano Concert preparation are now in full swing! We just concluded another inspiring year at the Suzuki Piano Institute in Louisville, Kentucky, hosting Bruce Anderson, Rae Kate Shen, and Karmalita Bawar, along with some fantastic enrichment-class faculty. The Kataoka Research Scholarship is an excellent way to get a head start on planning your workshop attendance next year. Don't forget that you have **ONLY TWO MORE MONTHS** to apply for scholarships to attend any 2017 event featuring the Japanese teachers! (Submission of a scholarship application does not obligate you to attend any particular event.)

Teachers who are in their initial stages or new to teaching Piano Basics may apply to attend a workshop or Ten-Piano Concert held in the United States. Experienced teachers may also apply for scholarships toward study in Japan or the Matsumoto Ten-Piano Concert.

Applications will be received until the deadline, **SEPTEMBER 1, 2016**. To request the application guidelines and application form, contact Hannah Hall: correctthecause@gmail.com or 502-415-5122.

Your gifts to the Scholarship Fund are building our future as Piano Basics teachers! To donate, send your contribution to Treasurer Linda Nakagawa, 242 River Acres Drive, Sacramento, CA, 95831.



Dr. Kataoka's Humor

Reminiscence submitted by Malinda Rawls

We remember Dr. Haruko Kataoka as a serious, often stern, teacher, but she had a wonderful sense of humor that would surface from time to time when least expected. She loved the following joke:

Two elderly women were out driving in a large car; both could barely see over the dashboard. As they were cruising along, they came to major crossroad. The stoplight was red, but they just went on through.

The woman in the passenger seat thought to herself "I must be losing it. I could have sworn we just went through a red light." After a few more minutes, they came to another major junction and the light was red again. Again, they went right through.

The woman in the passenger seat was almost sure that the light had been red but was really concerned that she was losing it. She was getting nervous. At the next junction, sure enough, the light was red and they went on through. So, she turned to the other woman and said, "Mildred, did you know that we just ran through three red lights in a row? You could have killed us both!"



Mildred turned to her and said, "Oh my God! Am I driving?!?"

At the conclusion of the telling of this joke, Dr. Kataoka rejoined: "Oh my God, am I teaching?!?"

New Members/New Opportunities!

By Karen Hagberg

We old-timers in Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation are often asked how does one get trained in the Suzuki Piano Basics Method. There is a sense that teachers would like us to outline a program of studying the Book levels in the Suzuki Method for a certain amount of time after which teachers would become “certified” to teach this way.

For those too young to remember, Dr. Kataoka always resisted advocating teacher training that had a beginning, middle, and end. She resisted the program of studying each Book for five days, after which you were done with that book and moved on to the next. She disagreed with the concept that a teacher was ever finished with continuing education, and instead advocated the lifelong study that she called “research” into the best way to play and to teach piano.

We welcome every new teacher who has recently joined the Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation. And we encourage you to take advantage of the many opportunities in the upcoming year to pursue the best kind of research with the teachers from Japan who worked directly with Dr. Kataoka from childhood. There are the two 10-Piano Concerts, in Sacramento and in Japan, and four upcoming workshops, two in February and two in August. Plan to attend as many of these events as you possibly can. This is the way to become trained as a teacher of Suzuki Piano Basics. Do this for yourself. Do it for your students. And enjoy the journey!

Expectations: a Note to Parents

By Laura Kauppi

I would like to ask each one of you to think back on a time you were unable to do something. Imagine something specific, something that you are still unable to do. Perhaps it was learning a new sport (maybe skiing!) or a task at work that never quite made sense to you. These are experiences we have all had.

Keeping that in mind, I would like to you think through this filter each time you ask your child to perform a task. To a child, there are many tasks that seem monumentally difficult and impossible, and it is our responsibility as adults to select only do-able challenges for our children.

We are asking children to put their trust in us when we ask them to do something difficult, and if we ask them to do something impossible, we have broken that trust. Please remember this, and keep in mind how it feels to be truly unable to perform a task. This is not something we want them to experience.

I am careful when I make monthly practice goals for each student. These practice goals are individualized. If a child struggles to practice, I lower the goal. Occasionally, I will end up with an extremely low goal. The parent (meaning well, of course) says, No, no, I know she

can do more! The child, however, has shown me by not doing more that she *cannot* do more. If I continue to write the same practice goal month after month and the child never reaches it, she feels like a failure at piano and shuts down. If instead I make a goal so low that she feels she can accomplish it, she may complete one or two weeks of short practice, feel better about piano, and begin practicing more. One or two minutes of good practice is infinitely better than no practice at all.

I am careful when I assign repetitions. Often, I would like a student to practice something fifty times, and though this would be ideal, I write only the number I think that individual child could reasonably do in a day. For some children, the number is fifty, but for others fifty would be so overwhelming that I ask for only five or ten.

Please keep this in mind when working with your child. If you find your child overwhelmed by 30 minutes of practice, ask only for 5 minutes. Is 5 minutes too much? Practice only 2 minutes. Please remember that a small amount of good work is infinitely better than no work at all, and certainly preferable to forcing a shut-down child to sit at the piano past his/her ability to do anything productive.

Moving, Cleaning, Downsizing??

Does your attic, garage or basement hold old videos, probably on VHS reels or other small tape format, of Dr. Kataoka teaching students? Hopefully you have not decided to discard these when you discarded your VHS player. Hopefully, you know these are valuable and have saved them, but don't really know what to do with them.

If you send them to Prof. Ken Wilburn (address below), your video will be digitalized and saved on the internet for future study, and they will stop deteriorating in your house/attic/basement/garage!

Members, when you view this invaluable resource (by sending email request to Dr. Wilburn wilburnk@ecu.edu) we hope that you will be moved to send your videos, regardless of format, that may be collecting dust in your homes and that are surely on their way to decomposition. It is also a good idea to contact the families of former students who may have had lessons with Dr. Kataoka to contribute their videos as well. Please identify,

Piano Basics Foundation Upcoming Workshops/Events

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 9-13, 2017 Orange County, California

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

February 2-6, 2017 Louisville, Kentucky

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshops
with Keiko Kawamura and Keiko Ogiwara
Contact Bruce Boiney 502-241-5921
boiney@suzukipiano.com

April 30, 2017 Matsumoto, Japan

Suzuki Piano Basics International 10-Piano Concert
Contact Karen Hagberg, 585-978-0600
kh@hagbergsuzuki.com

**Deadlines: For students with their teachers: 8/30/16
For teachers without students: 11/15/16
See additional information in article on p.5**

August 2017 Philadelphia and Sacramento

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshops
with Keiko Kawamura and Keiko Ogiwara
Exact dates tbd
Contact in Philadelphia: Janet Miller 267-251-0429
janet@alumni.curtis.edu
Contact in Sacramento: Linda Nakagawa 916-422-2952
g.nakagawa@comcast.net

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>