

# 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: August 30, 2017**

## *Legato: Let's Play the Piano the Way We Walk*

**By Haruko Kataoka**

From the Matsumoto Suzuki Piano Newsletter

December 17, 1993

Translated by Chisa Aoki and

Teri Paradero

Edited by Karen Hagberg

As human beings, we walk on two legs, achieving balance with the spine. We all do this well. The sole of the foot is soft and relaxed as we extend it to take a step forward. First the heel touches the ground followed by contact of the flexible sole and then the five toes as if to grasp the ground. Next, as we raise the heel, we push back on the ground as we propel ourselves forward, simultaneously bringing the other foot forward ready to take the next step. The repetition of this sequence of footwork enables us to walk smoothly without any jerky or awkward movements.

Imagine wearing hard footwear such as Dutch wooden shoes. Without the use of the flexibility of the sole of the foot, walking would surely be difficult. Using the sole stiffly like a piece of wood results in pounding the ground; such pounding would make it difficult to walk long distances. Of course, the entire body must be flexible and well balanced, but it is obvious to all of us who can walk that the most crucial elements for walking are flexible feet and toes.

As my title suggests, walking in a smooth, flowing manner is *legato*. The many definitions of *legato* include: smooth, calm, peaceful, not choppy, no accent, etc. The opposite of *legato* is *staccato* (detach or hop). For humans, walking *legato* is a basic skill, but it is only after we can walk sufficiently well that we may jump, skip and dance.

Now it is time to talk about the *legato* of piano technique. Although we use the entire body to play the piano, same as walking, we actually use both hands, all ten fingers, more specifically the tips of all ten fingers, to make contact with the keys.

Our fingertips touch the keys the same way the soles of our feet touch the ground when walking: as with the soles of our feet, the fingertips are flexible and limber; when they touch the keys, the fingers must touch the keys in the same way the toes of our feet firmly grip the ground. Otherwise, *legato* cannot be produced by the five fingers of each hand.

The most important and most difficult technique for playing the piano is *legato*. It is easy to make any sound on the piano. Because the piano is the kind of instrument that easily produces a sound when any hard object strikes

a key, everyone unintentionally hits and pokes the piano with stiff, hard fingers making terrible, percussive sounds. The piano can also make a sound with a gentle touch, but if we forget to move the fingertips one at a time, gripping as we use the soles of our feet, the fingertips float on the keys with wobbly wrists, resulting in a more-or-less pitiful, vague, or unclear sound.

Last summer, while working intensely on *legato* with teachers in Atlanta, one of them brought in a book written by Walter Gieseking (the famous pianist) and asked if I had read it. When I told her that I cannot read English, she announced that he writes about the very same thing I was teaching.

I can say with confidence that if you habitually move the fingertips carefully one at a time as you would when you use the soles of your feet, you will be able to make music that is clear and that has a well-articulated *legato*.

We must never forget one of the five senses granted to us from God; we must cherish our invaluable sense of touch, which is the most sensitive in our fingertips.

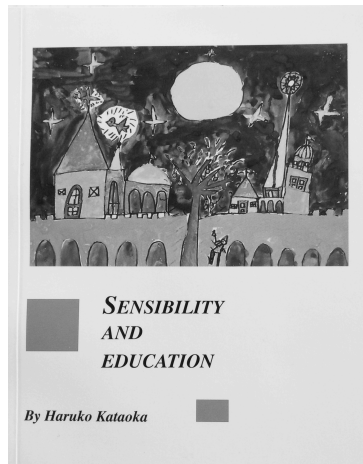
If stiff fingers in a collision course with the keys are employed when playing the piano, the exceptionally wonderful sense of touch of the fingertips will be lost. The fingertips will become hard like wood, rigid like dead fingers.

Please, everyone, study *legato*. The beginning point of being able to play the piano well is being able to play *legato* technique well. We must take care of the Basics of *legato* from Book 1. If you do this, make no mistake, you will become proficient and free at the piano and will be able to enjoy making music!

## ***Attention Teachers: New Membership Renewal Guidelines***

**\*\*\*RENEWALS DUE BY NOVEMBER 30, 2017\*\*\***

***Earn Free Copies of Dr. Kataoka's Sensibility and Education***



Teachers, you have the opportunity to earn ten free copies of Dr. Kataoka's groundbreaking book, *Sensibility and Education* (a \$150 value), simply by enrolling ten of your families as members of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation. Family membership is only \$25/calendar year, and those families who join *this fall* will receive the two remaining issues of the 2017 newsletter as a bonus. We encourage family membership, because it helps parents understand what the Suzuki Piano Basics Method stands for, thus facilitating our job as teachers. Parents who have read Dr. Kataoka's book have an even deeper understanding of what this teaching is all about. If you enroll more than ten families, you will receive that number of books.

PLEASE NOTE: At its April 2017 Meeting, the Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation Board decided that new memberships and

renewals paid by November 30 will be included in the 2018 Directory. This is a reminder to all current members to send in your renewal with the enclosed form now to avoid being left out. Collecting family memberships and remembering your own renewal, the Board assumes, will be easier at the beginning of the school year. The term of membership will remain January-December.

Newsletters for families will be sent in bulk to the teacher's studio for distribution.

Send your new memberships and renewals to Linda Nakagawa, Treasurer, Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation, 242 River Acres Drive, Sacramento CA 95831. Make check payable to Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation.

Thank you all for your continued support for the work of the Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation!

## ***Announcing Bert Mayers Memorial Fund***



Bert and Carole Mayers. Photo by Chip Deutsch.

Husband of long-term Suzuki Piano Basics member and supporter Carole Mayers, Vibert (Bert) Myers passed away suddenly and unexpectedly on June 4, 2017. Carole has requested a Memorial Fund in his memory be designated to augment our Scholarship Fund.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to stay at the Mayers home during various events over the years will remember Bert as a gentle soul, one who supported Carole's piano-teaching career in all ways. A former chef, Bert provided guests, including Dr. Kataoka (who never stopped talking about his talents), the most amazing meals prepared with seeming effortlessness and joy. It was clear that Bert loved our company and was proud of Carole's meaningful work.

Checks may be made out to Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation, Mayers Fund and sent to Linda Nakagawa, Treasurer SPBF, 242 River Acres Drive, Sacramento CA 95831



Dr. Kataoka having dinner at Mayers home, 1999. She never stopped talking about Bert's talents as a chef, and she liked this photo so much that she had it enlarged and framed for the wall in her studio in Matsumoto. Photo by Bert Mayers.

# **Does a Clean Piano Have Better Tone: Or... *Do you wash your hands before or after playing your instrument?***

**By Karen Hagberg**

**Original version published in Matsumoto News, Volume 1, no. 1**

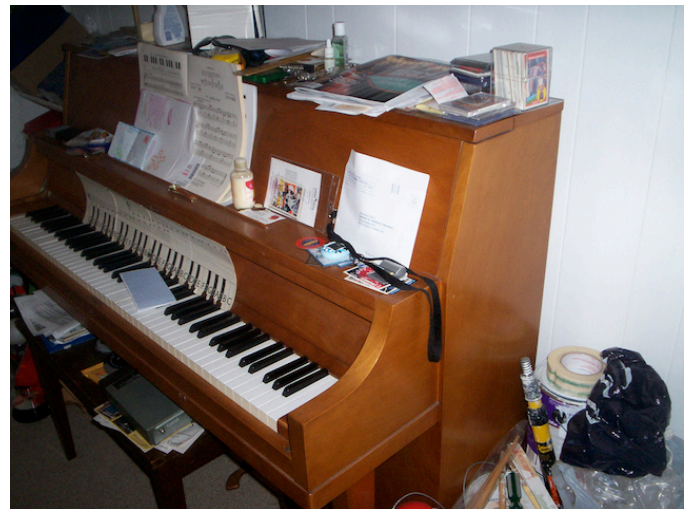
When I was a child I would envy children who played other instruments: a violin that came in a case lined with rich velvet containing accessories like rosin, a soft cloth, chin rest, and bow along with the instrument itself, all lacquered and glowing with a visual tone before it was played. Or a flute, gleaming silver; or maybe a black clarinet with shiny silver keys; or a golden trumpet. People who played such instrument were taught to perform a ritual shared only by others who also played. This consisted of opening the case, carefully lifting out the instrument, using the soft cloth to eradicate fingerprints and to maintain the shine, assembling parts, applying substances such as oil or rosin blotting up moisture: all acts of care and love for the instrument that comprised a ritualistic frame around the experience of playing it. The instrument was cared for: attended to. Every so often the need to replenish special accessories would require a trip to the music store. All of this seemed to me, as a child, very grownup and special.

Quite an opposite experience happened around my piano, already a fixture in my home from a previous generation. It was taken for granted as a piece of furniture rather than a musical instrument. It sat open and collected dust and clutter. The keys were greasy with fingerprints. The case was scratched and dented. There were rings on the case

where people had placed drinks over the past many decades. Nothing about my lessons taught me how to take care of my instrument.

When my parents had a new living room added onto our house and my grandmother's upright was moved from my bedroom into the new room, the beat-up instrument and the junk all around it were considered so unsightly that a closet was built for it so it could be completely hidden when not in use.

Pianos in music conservatories in the United States are often in a similar state of neglect and disrepair. Even at the most prestigious institutions it is not uncommon to see nine-foot grands whose cases are



Junky piece of furniture.

battered, whose keys have never been cleaned, and whose insides are blanketed with an ancient layer of dust.

**Pianos here are truly musical instruments, and everyone is taught to respect them and learns how to care for them.**

Here at the Talent Education Institute in Matsumoto there are nine pianos: nine- and seven-foot pianos in the concert hall, two six-foot Yamaha grands in each upstairs studio, a six-foot Kawai and a six-foot Eastin (German) in Kataoka Sensei's studio, and an upright German player piano in the conference room. It is difficult to tell the age of these piano, because each one is in showroom condition. They are kept closed when not in use, dusted daily. The finish on the cases is so shiny that I find myself wiping off my fingerprints after touching it. When a piano in the hall is moved across the stage, the movers wear white gloves. On several of these instruments, the bright red strip of felt laid across the keys at the factory is still used when the piano is put away.

The doors on all the rooms at the school remain unlocked, and we are free to use any of these instruments whenever they are not in use, even those in Sensei's studio. Pianos here are truly musical instruments, and everyone is taught to respect them and learns how to care for them. When I first saw the pianos here I

was really struck with how badly the pianos I had previously known had been treated by me and by everyone else.

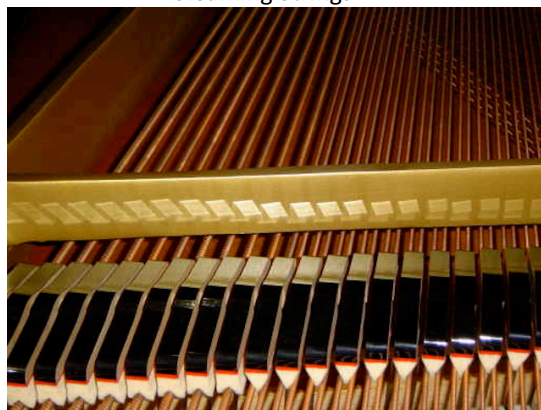
It is really true: a clean piano has better tone. A piano treated as a musical instrument is a musical instrument; and a piano taken for granted is nothing more than a piece of old furniture, regardless of its original quality. This is the first lesson I have learned here. I now understand why Kataoka Sensei seems so

**It is really true: a clean piano has better tone.**

fussy about pianos when she comes to teach in the United States. Even before the basic issues of tuning, voicing, and regulation we must ask, "Has this instrument been treated as an instrument?" And we can know the answer from the other side of the room.

Young pianists need to be presented with a world just as unique and wondrous as the world of the young violinist. They need a wonderful instrument and should be trained in its care. Someone should teach them how to practice the ritual of taking care of it. The piano needs to be something separate from mundane objects in the home. Its appearance should suggest its sound. What kind of pianos do our students experience in our studios? Do we train parents well enough in the care of the piano at home?

Gleaming Strings





Families need not run out and purchase new grand pianos (although this would be ideal). They can begin by taking very inexpensive measures: moving the clutter off the instrument, polishing the case, cleaning the keys, keeping the instrument well-tuned and regulated, covering the keys with a strip of felt, and keeping the piano closed when not in use and dusted daily.

Before formal study begins, a child should be exposed to an instrument at home that is treated like an instrument. Any child will love to have the opportunity to have lessons on such a wonderful thing.

*Matsumoto News* Republication: From September 1988 through January 1992, Karen Hagberg lived and studied in Matsumoto with Dr. Haruko Kataoka, the co-Founder of the Suzuki Piano Method and the founder of the Suzuki Piano Basics Method. During that time she published a newsletter with nine issues annually that was distributed to Suzuki piano teachers in North America and Europe. In addition to news of upcoming workshops and multi-piano concerts, each issue contained an article intended to share what it was like as a foreigner to live in Japan and to study with Dr. Kataoka and Dr. Suzuki.

Nearly twenty years have elapsed since the first issue of *Matsumoto News*: an entire generation. By popular demand we are re-publishing the articles here. They have been edited from the original, but they remain under copyright and may not be reproduced without written permission from the author.



Karen Hagberg.  
Photo by James Schuck.

### ***Want to Apply for a Scholarship? Want to Help a Teacher Get a Scholarship?***

Now is the time to contact our Scholarship Committee Chair, Hannah Hall [correctthecause@gmail.com](mailto:correctthecause@gmail.com) if you are interested in applying for financial help for any event conducted by the teachers from Japan in the year 2018. As the end of the summer draws near, the workshops and events for 2018 will be announced, but you may begin the application process now.

And to ALL TEACHERS who will be submitting your membership renewals *before November 30*, please consider donating to the Scholarship Fund to help younger teachers get involved with the kind of research they need to become Suzuki Piano Basics teachers. The preservation of Dr. Kataoka's amazing pedagogy depends on those of us who know and appreciate it. Let's be generous!

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

**November 9-11, 2017**

**Salt Lake City, Utah**

Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop

with Bruce Anderson

Contact: Cleo Brimhall, 801-943-1237

[callcleo@msn.com](mailto:callcleo@msn.com)

**WATCH FOR 2018 EVENTS IN NEXT NEWSLETTER!**

**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 [hagberg-drake@juno.com](mailto:hagberg-drake@juno.com), 585-978-0600).

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

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