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Suzuki
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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

I Can Read Music

(Part 3 of 3)

By Haruko Kataoka

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As mentioned previously, pianists must play all voices by themselves with their left and right hands. So the proper music reading skill is very important.

We humans are equipped with two hands with five fingers in each hand. By the time we are playing two, three and four voices, we need to be able to look at the score to interpret the significance of every note.

We have to be able to understand the score accurately while simultaneously being able to produce the correct sounds. For this, a high level of technique is absolutely important.

At this point, it is my hope that people are cognizant of a certain mistaken idea. This does not only apply to reading music. It is a problem that is common in all aspects of life: confusing what one 'understands with the mind' with the actual ability to 'do' something; or, furthermore, thinking that both are one and the same as if it is natural that having knowledge means having the ability to 'do'.

Understanding something with the mind, in other words, having knowledge, is in a totally different realm from being able to do it.

Even the most intellectual minds cannot do everything with their arsenal of knowledge. You can look far and wide, but you will not find someone whose massive knowledge equals what they can 'do.'

On the other hand, there are many things you can 'do' that do not require knowledge. Childhood is a stage in life where there is great reliance on what one can 'do.' By the time children are three years old, they are fluent in speaking their mother tongue. Their speech is grammatically correct using the past or present tense. However, at this point they have no knowledge of grammar.

Japanese adults studying English accumulate a considerable amount of knowledge. It is questionable, however, that they are able to utilize their trove of information about English [by being able to speak fluently]. This kind of difference between knowledge or information and 'doing' or 'being able' is applicable to all aspects in life.

Similarly, this applies to reading music. Piano teachers from all over the world who have graduated from music school have a wealth of knowledge and information, obviously, since they have studied music. However, in reality, when it comes to being able to make sound, more specifically when playing the piano, most of them are not able to play properly.

One more important issue is that it is common for adults to mistakenly assume that because children are immature, they settle with make-do teaching because they presumably can learn difficult things as adults. However, it is too late to learn

things that the body can truly 'do' if learning is delayed until adulthood.

This is as clearly demonstrated in the world of sports as it is for learning the mother tongue. It is evident how important a time childhood really is.

The important basics of reading music are:

- 1) Time signature of a piece. For instance, if it is two beats or it is 3 beats, being able to play correctly by riding on the rhythm of the piece according to the number of beats.
- 2) Note value, or length of notes. The ability to read/interpret the note values correctly whether they be quarter, eighth, sixteenth, etc, and express them accordingly so the piece can be played accurately.
- 3) The ability to discern what parts are melody and what parts are accompaniment. In other words, be able to control the weight/volume of the sound so there is distinction between melody and accompaniment.
- 4) To be able to pay attention to the fingerings.
- 5) To be able to comprehend and execute notations indicating expression.

For beginners who are just starting to read music, teachers must be tenacious and teach patiently and thoroughly without any omissions of the Basics, so children can gradually accumulate good technique over time and develop the ability for the body to play the piano in the best way possible.

It is often said that children who study Suzuki Method are not able to read music. That is incorrect. Children who have learned the Suzuki Method properly and correctly have always been raised and nurtured to be able to read music with accuracy.

Contrary to common opinion, I believe that those who have not learned the Suzuki Method, in other words, those who learned the traditional way, as mentioned before, those who

have graduated from music school, cannot read music in a comprehensive, correct way.

Let us learn to read music Uncompromisingly and thoroughly.

Let us not be music illiterates.

If You Can Play Book 1, You Can Play Anything: First Thoughts on Research

By Karen Hagberg

Early on in my attempt to learn about the Suzuki Method, I found myself at a summer institute studying Book 2 with a well-known American teacher trainer who had a lot of difficulty comprehending Kataoka Sensei's way of teaching. One day, this person explained in an incredulous tone, "Mrs. Kataoka says if you can play Book 1 you can play anything, but I'm sorry, *Lightly Row* is a far cry from the Tchaikovsky Concerto!" Most students in the class nodded in agreement, their western logic all intact.

I had a different reaction. Such preposterous-sounding statements uttered by wise people have always fascinated me. Karaoke Sensei had, after all, developed this repertoire and first applied the Suzuki method to the piano; her students were far superior to those of any other teacher I knew; she had spent more time using this repertoire than anybody: what she said was probably *true*, I thought, incredible as it seemed at face value. I wondered if I could ever discover this truth for myself. Pondering this was infinitely more interesting than were the "teaching points" in Book 2 being enumerated in the class. Even in the context of an attempt to discredit Kataoka Sensei, I was inspired by her words. This idea, in particular, continues to fascinate and motivate me.

Here in Japan now, I am a *kenkyusei*, a researcher, trying to discover for myself some basic truths about the production of tone, about the natural use of the body, and about the amazing ability of young children. As time goes on, I feel more and more that these truths are to be found in that one provocative statement: "If you can play Book 1, you can play anything." I am quite sure I do not nearly understand the full implications of the idea yet, but I will try to explain what I have learned so far.

First of all, playing Book 1 well is not easy. There

Book 1 requires all the basic piano techniques...to (achieve) our open expression of the ideal sound we want to hear.

is an assumption on the part of most people that short pieces with few notes are, by definition, easy to play and that long pieces with lots of notes are difficult. Of course, with a longer piece there is more to memorize, but here at the Talent Education Institute it is assumed that memorizing any piece is easy, but that playing it beautifully is another thing altogether. The very simplicity of Book 1 pieces makes them especially challenging when concentrating on beautiful tone, because

there is almost nothing but tone to capture the listener's interest.

There are analogies in the world of sports. Playing Book 1 is like doing school figures in figure skating or doing dressage on horseback. These things are not appreciated by the general audience. School figures and dressage are therefore not televised during coverage of the Olympic Games for fear of boring the television audience. As one riding friend put it: "Watching dressage is like watching grass grow." Most people would see nothing happening. But without becoming excellent at these basic moves, riding or skating at more complicated and flashy levels is quite impossible.

Dressage, school figures, and Book 1 embody the Basics of their respective disciplines. If these esoteric, yet fundamental, aspects are not learned carefully and executed perfectly, everything, the more "acrobatic" and therefore entertaining events (the show jumping, the ice dancing, the Tchaikovsky Concerto) will be flawed. To understand why and how (and even

If you can play Book 1, you can play anything.

whether or not) the flashy performances are defective, one must understand the level of perfection possible on the most basic level. To begin understanding this, we need first to find a world of interest and fascination where almost everyone else just sees grass growing.

Anybody can hear the difference between me and Alicia DeLarocha playing Mozart, but it would take a better trained ear to hear the difference in our playing of Book 1. Hers would sound better to most people, but then we begin to ask *why* her performance is better. I have practiced Book 1 for years; I play all the right notes; I have listened to thousands of performances by now, good and bad; I know what a good performance sounds like and how I want myself to sound. Exactly what is it about my sound that is inferior—what is it about the way I play that produces the inferior sound? This is the

beginning of research. Finding answers to such questions is the only way to begin to understand the more obvious differences in a more complex piece. What sounds merely like "grass growing" to the untrained ear becomes endlessly fascinating in this way.

Book 1 requires all the basic piano techniques: good tone production; creating legato, singing melodies with a natural shape; riding on the natural rhythm of the piece; executing the natural dynamics of ascending and descending scale passages; playing chordal and Alberti Bass accompaniments beautifully and quietly: in other words, playing every note in a natural relation to the notes around it with beautiful tone. When our results are not as natural as we want them to be, we need to examine how well we are really listening to our own sound, whether or not our body is moving without tension in the most physically efficient way, whether or not we lack total concentration, whether or not there are other psychological barriers to our open expression of the ideal sound we want to hear. This too is the beginning of research.

As teachers, it is not enough to know which performance we prefer. We cannot teach how to play unless we are sure that one performance is superior to another, why this is so, and then how to change and improve the less good one. Preferring Alicia DeLarocha's performance over mine is not a matter of taste. Hers really is better in aesthetically absolute terms. Kataoka Sensei operates in this realm. Finding this aesthetic realm is also the beginning of research.

Kataoka Sensei was once teaching a lesson on the Tchaikovsky Concerto. The student was asked to repeat an octave passage, and Sensei told him over and over that it was not good. The student became exasperated, as if Kataoka Sensei were making unreasonable demands on him—wanting too much from the passage. "It's not me who says it isn't right, ask them (turning to the audience). Raise your hand if you thought it was good." Only a couple of people, out of sympathy, raised their hands. After endless repetitions most

people in the audience still did not react. “When they all raise their hands, then it’s good—not until then,” said Sensei.

In another lesson when a student became frustrated playing a passage over and over saying, “Isn’t it at least getting better?” Kataoka Sensei responded, “Better is worthless. There is only Yes and No. Better is No.”

Kataoka Sensei operates in this realm.

A good teacher, being the experienced researcher into the difference between good and bad tone, will not let the student flounder around in the realm of the merely adequate performance. Excellence required will be achieved. It begins with the teaching of Book 1, because if students learn to play Book 1, they can play anything.



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.

Piano Basics are Learned in Book One

By Linda Nakagawa

Kataoka Sensei constantly told us teachers at workshops that everything is learned in Book 1. And that if one could play Book 1 very well the rest was easy. Of course most of us would laugh and roll our eyes, thinking back on our lives as students and how we struggled to learn those beautiful advanced pieces by the great composers.

I am a teacher now, studying how to teach children to play the piano. The more I teach the more I realize how so far ahead Sensei was in her research of piano pedagogy. The more I teach

the more I realize I need to continue to study. All the Basics are in Book 1. These are some of the Basics of teaching piano. Not necessarily in the order of importance:

- How to play difficult rhythms (Twinkles)
- How to use the thumb
- How to play one beautiful, round tone
- How to play right hand melody and left hand melody

- How to play hands together with a beautiful melody and accompaniment
- How to play chords
- How to play scales
- How to play staccato and legato
- How to play the Alberti bass (Do-Sol-Mi-Sol and Do-Mi-Sol)
- How to listen to one's own tone
- How to play with good beat and rhythm (breathe)

The beauty of this method is that all the responsibility belongs to the teacher. I am the model for my students. It is my job to teach them by my own demonstration at the piano:

- How to Bow
- How to sit with good posture
- How to carry the arms.
- How to use the body with flexibility
- How to focus and concentrate
- How to work at something that might not come easily (learn how to overcome frustration)
- How to enjoy learning the work it takes to do a good job, to know the difference, and not to be satisfied with mediocrity

Yes, the pressure is on us teachers, and it should be. That is the reason we continue to have lessons with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura. When I first was introduced to this method, I believed it to be important to study from the originator, the creator, Dr. Haruko Kataoka. But she is no longer with us and Ogiwara and

Kawamura Senseis are the direct descendants, so I choose to continue my studies with them. Just the other day I ran into a parent of one of my former students and I told him that we will be having a workshop in Sacramento this coming August and I invited him to attend the Friendship Concert. He asked me what I was going to do. I told him that I would be observing the lessons being taught and that I would also have a lesson. He was surprised and told me that I had plenty of knowledge and experience and didn't need to have a lesson. On the contrary, I know that there is no end to learning. I must continue to study, observe, and take lessons with the teachers Kataoka Sensei taught from childhood. It is the only way for me to become a better teacher for my students.

I am not interested that my students simply play correct notes to piano pieces. (They really don't need a teacher if that's all they want to do.) I want them to have the desire to make a musical sound on the piano. Those "Basics" take time to develop into abilities. As a teacher teaching students beyond Book 1, I have to continue to demonstrate how to play those "Basics" in more advanced repertoire. Otherwise, the students will simply learn the notes and want to just move on to the next piece until they are finally dissatisfied with their sound or physically unable to play all the notes because of undeveloped technique.

We teachers are human beings too. We get busy, tired and frustrated like anyone else. But let's take a little time, re-read Dr. Suzuki's *Nurtured by Love* and Dr. Kataoka's *Sensibility and Education*. These books will renew our spirit so we can again become passionate about our teaching and believe that yes, every child can learn to play the piano beautifully. But this will not happen unless we continue to improve our own ability to play.

Let's judge our teaching by our worst student.
There is always hope and there is always room to
improve.



***Do you work with new teachers?
Tell them about our Scholarships!***

Suzuki Piano Basics Teachers are always eager to share their knowledge with other teachers, and consequently there are many of you who know teachers who are new to this Method and interested in learning more.

There are so many exciting events coming up in the very near future: two August workshops and one in February with teachers from Japan, and then the 10-Piano Concert in Matsumoto in April next year. The August workshops will feature the attendance of eight students from Japan, and participants will be able to see them have lessons and hear them perform in the Friendship Concert. The February workshop is in sunny southern California! We hope that you will plan to attend and to bring along an eager new teacher!

Please inform new people about our scholarship program and have them contact Hannah Hall, Chair of our Scholarship Committee for information about how to apply correctthecause@gmail.com. Application forms are also available on the Suzuki Piano Basics web site (simply Google Suzuki Piano Basics).

You're Invited: 10-Piano Concert in Matsumoto

The teachers in Japan once again have invited American teachers and students to participate in their 10-Piano Concert, scheduled for Sunday, April 28, 2019. The American contingent will leave on Thursday, April 11 in order to participate in the final two weeks of rehearsal, and return on Monday, April 29.

THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- ❖ All teacher members of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation may attend to observe rehearsals. Those who have previously attended as observers may apply to bring a student.
- ❖ Students age 13 and over may apply, and will be accompanied by their teachers (not parents). *Teachers may not bring their own child.**
- ❖ It is highly recommended that applying students have a lesson at one of the August workshops or at the Orange County workshop in February.
- ❖ After repertoire is assigned, students should be prepared to play the entire piece from memory, hands alone or together, and be able to start anywhere for rehearsals. They should be able to play with natural posture, hands above the keyboard, and with balanced wrists. Teachers, please practice the piece yourselves in order to assist your student's practice in Japan.
- ❖ Application deadline for students is August 25, 2018. Deadline for teachers applying without a student is November 15. Please contact Karen Hagberg to receive detailed information and application forms.
- ❖ Family members of performing students are welcome to come to Matsumoto to attend the concert.

**In addition to being a musical experience, participation in the 10-Piano Concert is considered a cultural experience for young people that will shape their growth into independent adults. They will be living with a Japanese family and experiencing daily life in Japan. We ask parents to understand that their presence during the two weeks of rehearsal would significantly dilute this experience.*



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

June 11-15, 2018

Louisville, Kentucky

Louisville Suzuki Piano Basics Institute
Contact Bruce Boiney 502-241-5921
boiney@suzukipiano.com
www.suzukipiano.org

August 2-6, 2018

Louisville, Kentucky

Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop
With Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura
Contact Bruce Boiney 502-241-5921
boiney@suzukipiano.com
www.suzukipiano.org

August 9-13, 2018

Sacramento, California

Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop
With Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura
Contact Linda Nakagawa, 916-422-2952
g.nakagawa@comcast.net

February 14-18, 2019

Orange County, California

Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Research Workshop
With Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura
Contact Rae Kate Shen, 909-794-9461
raekshen@ymail.com

April 28, 2019

Matsumoto, Japan 10-Piano Concert

Leave April 11; Return April 29
Contact Karen Hagberg, 585-978-0600
khagberg1943@gmail.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 (khagberg1943@gmail.com, 585-978-0600).

Suzuki Piano Basics Web Site and discussion group:

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