

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*

Heart to Heart

By Haruko Kataoka

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There is an old saying that when there is abundance in the world, there is lack of heart, and conversely, when money and things are scarce there is an abundance of heart.

If that is true, it is a dangerous time in present-day Japan. Since the mid-twentieth century, every possible type of material goods has become abundant. Accordingly, as a result, money has been easier to earn. As a matter of course, this has impoverished the heart.

Nevertheless, last November during the preparation for the 10-Piano Concert, a heartwarming story emerged. Five year old, Jonathan from Louisville, Kentucky came to Matsumoto with his parents for the 10-Piano Concert. I learned that soon after he was born he had contracted polio which adversely affected his motor reflexes. As a result, he uses a walker in order to stand or walk. However, I was happy to find out that, despite his physical constraints, he started taking piano lessons, and by the time he managed to play the Twinkles his condition had improved so much that it amazed his doctor.

As a result, his parents are committed to his piano practice and decided to bring him to Japan for the 10-Piano Concert. He and his parents home-stayed together.

During the two weeks, the homestay family's four year old son, 'K', being very kind and friendly, played happily with Jonathan. Although he spoke Japanese and Jonathan spoke English when they played together, they had no difficulty communicating with each other.

Children make no issue with language. They communicate heart-to-heart. Jonathan, who easily expresses his feelings, said, "This is the best family in all of Japan! 'K' is an angel!" In the past, as a result of his physical condition, there may have been times when he experienced bullying by others.

The morning after the concert as they prepared to depart for home, Jonathan cried and implored his mother, "I'm not going home. I'm staying here!" The homestay mother was so attached after taking care of Jonathan for two weeks, she too was crying as they said their goodbyes.

Tyler, another 5-year-old student from the US home-stayed with a family of two boys, ages five and three. He is tall for his age and a bit spoiled, but smart. So even when they had disagreements, he did not fight with five-year-old because he knew he could not win, but was mostly poking at the three-year-old.

When the two weeks went by and the guests had gone home, the three-year-old who had been teased said to his mother, "This is Tyler's portion. We have to save it for him." Though they seemingly looked as if they weren't quite getting along during the two-week homestay, he somehow developed a connection of the heart. Isn't the human heart so amazing?

Coincidentally, I read an article in the newspaper that so touched my heart in a similar way. It was about Saint-Exupéry, the French aviator and writer. As you all may know, he is the author of *The Little Prince*. Shortly before the end of World War II in 1944, being a French commissioned aviation officer, he was assigned to an aerial reconnaissance mission. Unfortunately, he never returned from the mission. When both allied and enemy forces learned of his disappearance, all the German fighter pilots offered symbolic gestures of condolence by waving the wings of their planes.

Saint-Exupéry loved flying more than anything. He combined his passion and joy of flying with the times of suffering in his life to create the literary work he felt was relevant to the human condition.

People all over the world loved and revered him. I was so moved by the news that even the German pilots, supposedly the enemy pilots, felt such pain in their hearts upon hearing of his tragic loss that they openly expressed their sympathy.

The heart of every single human being can be so extraordinary. Where, or how, is it possible that there is such a thing as war? The most important aspect of a human is the heart. We all should realize one-by-one, heart-to-heart, that if we can just be open to understanding and communication this is of utmost importance, more than money, more than material things.

It is my fervent wish that we become a world where we cherish the heart.



Sacramento Workshop August 2018

Speech Delivered by Ogiwara Sensei

Translated by Haruko Sakakibara
Edited by Karen Hagberg

Dr. Shinichi Suzuki, the founder of the Suzuki Method, desired to become an educator who could nurture human beings through music. According to his thinking, the work of education truly requires our continuous, patient effort.

This is very different from the way the business world operates, with attention on short-term profits on a day-to-day basis. Since we are in the business of nurturing people, there are no numbers to quantify our effect on students.

In order for educators to repeat the same good input every day, [without the benefit of being able to see daily results] an amazing amount of patience is required in order to maintain consistency. It is as if watering a desert.

Our piano mentor, the late Dr. Haruko Kataoka, once had an opportunity to listen to a lecture by Dr. Suzuki toward the end of her life. She told us how surprised she was when she noticed he had been saying exactly

the same thing for fifty years: “All children will grow up. Everything depends on how we raise them.”

Dr. Suzuki knew it takes many long years, repeating the same thing over and over, in order to be understood and to see his concept spread out into the world.

Someone who can continue to repeat the importance of something is truly wonderful. That person is able to do it because of strong convictions.

Let us think about what you may be experiencing at home as parents of piano students. You may be wondering how many more times you *have to* give the same reminders in order for your child to be able to develop an ability to play piano.

I have a suggestion. Can you change the way of looking at it? What about thinking how many more times will you *be able to lovingly remind them* in order for them to truly get it?

Many years from now, the time will come when you witness how your patient and caring reminders have contributed to a solid ability for your child who, with this kind of nurturing, has also developed a wonderful personality.

Let's look forward to such a joyous time together.

***Students from Japan and Their Homestay Families
Sacramento Workshop 2018***



From left to right: Debbie Yamamoto, Reese Namikawa, Lucas Namikawa, Blake Namikawa, Hinata Karasawa, Komako Uchiyama, Kako Nozawa, Rin Nagaoka, Chihiro Ohta, Akiko Higuchi, Leah Brewster, Yui Yokoyama, Kyoka Iwabuchi, and Quynh Nguyen.

Learn the Basics

By Linda Nakagawa

As mentioned in my previous article, all the “Basics” of learning how to play the piano are learned in Book One of the Suzuki Piano School. However, do not misunderstand, children must be taught the “Basics” of how to play by demonstration. The repertoire is found in the book, but the teaching of it needs to be carried out by an experienced teacher who can show the student how it is done. Children are very quick to learn the notes in Book One because they are listening constantly, every day. Unless they are taught how to sit, how to use the thumb, how to play one note etc., they will not learn how to use their body naturally to produce the best tone from the piano. It is our job as teachers to show them. Teaching the “Basics” is not teaching something elementary. Rather, it is providing a strong foundation for learning how to play the piano. We must keep working on this foundation for more than 10 years for every single student.

Teachers must be able to play Book One seriously and easily so we can be the best model for our students. These Folk Songs must sound beautiful, lively, and musical. We must teach the students to listen to their own sound especially while they practice one hand alone.

It takes at least 10 years to develop a skill and the beginning is most important. Without a strong, developed skill, it is impossible to play musically or expressively. Just as we have demonstrated to them how to play the left hand chords to Mary had a Little Lamb, we must continue to reinforce that in every piece from Book Two and beyond. Just as we have demonstrated how to play scales, we must reinforce that also. My students who are playing in Books 3, 4, 5 and beyond using the

Do Mi So pattern in the left hand accompaniment are reminded that we studied the very same thing when they learned Cuckoo in Book One. Everything that we teach them in Book One must be reinforced for more than 10 years.

It is not necessary that the teacher be able to play every piece by memory from beginning to end. That is the job of the student. However, the teacher must be able to choose a part where the student is not using his/her body naturally and demonstrate the appropriate way to achieve the natural, most beautiful sound. Unfortunately it is easy to play the notes on the piano. All we have to do is press the correct key with the right hand and the left hand and much of the time that is satisfactory to the masses. But it is hopeful that Suzuki Piano Basics teachers know better and strive to demonstrate to our students how to create truly musical sound.

I strongly believe that all piano teachers, Suzuki or Traditional, want the best for their students. But Suzuki Piano Basics Teachers are fortunate because we were able to study with Dr. Haruko Kataoka and are able to continue our studies with Keiko Ogiwara and Keiko Kawamura to improve our demonstration skills. A teacher cannot be successful teaching with words, especially with young children.

So let's continue to take lessons with the Japanese teachers. Let's use our time wisely and demonstrate how to play in parts. It is not necessary for teachers to simply play the notes or learn the “tricky” parts in each piece. It is more important to improve our own ability to play the “Basics” in Book One, improve our ability to our ability to listen to the sounds our

students make. If we do that, we can help them through any level. This is what we learn

at the Suzuki Piano Basics Workshops with the Japanese teachers.

Teachers at the Sacramento Workshop 2018



From Left to right: Rita Burns, Shirlee Rickman, Rae Kate Shen, Keiko Kawamura, Renee Eckis, Keiko Ogiwara, Linda Carrier, Naomi Wysong, Wakako Brewster, Mei Ihara, Haruko Sakakibara, Stela Popa, and Jacki Block.

More on Reading

***By Karen Hagberg
Matsumoto News, June 1989***

Reading music is an important matter to understand, especially because Suzuki Method is sometimes labeled, in America at least, as the Method in which children do not learn to read.

“Sight-reading,” the ability to play a piece as one reads it for the first time, is valued by music teachers in North America. When we say the ability to read, we mean the ability to sight-read. This skill is useful in certain situations, and most people feel that a good, well-rounded musician must be able to read at sight.

The only way to teach sight-reading is to provide guided practice. As soon as a piece is read through once the student is no longer sight-reading, however, so the student needs to be constantly presented with new pieces for sight-reading practice. The music needs to be technically easy for the student, since the aim is to have a “clean” reading on the very first attempt with, most important of all, no stopping, since sight-reading is most useful in ensemble situations.

Kataoka Sensei’s definition of reading is the faithful reproduction **in sound** of everything on the printed page. No matter how many times a student has played a piece, s/he may be considered a poor reader if there are any wrong notes or even if a dynamic marking or a fingering is wrong or,

worst of all, if the piece does not sound like **music**—if the rhythm is flat—if the piece has no life. Reading is taking the printed page and bringing it to life.

Thus, reading as Kataoka Sensei teaches it is completely different from “sight-reading:” it is the **opposite** of sight-reading. Rather than aiming for an acceptable playing of the notes on first reading with no stopping and then going on to other pieces, students here learn to follow every direction in the music. After a week or two of practice, concentrating on achieving a careful, musical reading, Kataoka Sensei assesses the results for their musical value: to what extent has the student transformed the printed page into music?

Put another way: American children are presented with two kinds of music in their lessons: their performance pieces and their sight-reading material. The quality of the playing in the performance pieces is expected to be much higher than in the reading. Reading pieces are not perfected. Practicing reading, therefore, is practicing imprecision and mere adequacy. Teachers rarely work on technique in reading material because to do so would make it no longer “sight-reading” work by our definition, so the students’ worst technical bad habits tend to surface as they concentrate only on touching the right keys at the right time.

In Kataoka Sensei’s studio there are also two kinds of music, the repertoire pieces and the reading material. The quality of playing in each case is expected to be the same. Having heard recordings of the Suzuki repertoire pieces, the student need not really read the music, but in the reading pieces the student must learn to follow every direction on a page and to make music of it—to make it come alive. Technical ability is stressed as an integral part of reading (see earlier article “On Reading”). No attempt is made *per se* to develop the

ability to read at sight, only on the ability to transform the printed page into real music. Musical standards for both types of pieces are exactly the same.

A recent American violin graduate of the Talent Education Institute is presently living in Tokyo and has the opportunity to play in chamber groups with musicians trained since early childhood with the Suzuki Method. She told me that it is true, that Suzuki-trained musicians do not read as well as she does on the first reading of a piece. But then, by the second, third, or fourth reading, they can perfect the piece, while with her kind of reading ability the level of playing is mediocre on first reading and does not improve through subsequent repetitions. She feels the need to go home and practice by herself before she can begin to play the piece at a higher level.

Practicing “sight-reading” is playing many pieces superficially. No doubt it encourages sloppiness and inaccuracy. But learning to read really well is learning to play well. A good reader trained in Suzuki Method is a

very quick study. Such a student can learn advanced pieces in an astonishingly short time. The very first reading might be cautious, because the student has been trained to consider **everything** on the page, not just to skim over the surface of the piece churning out notes at a specified tempo. But this student has the ability to raise the level of the performance on subsequent readings with amazing facility and, of course, to memorize the music effortlessly. This is the answer to the question that all foreign teacher-trainees have: Why do Kataoka Sensei’s students rarely look at the music while playing their reading pieces? The question to ask is which kind of reading ability do we want for ourselves and our students?



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.

Teachers! Families! Renew Now! Invite New Members!

It's fall and we're all back to our teaching schedules for the academic year. The 2019 dues for teachers and families are now due and payable. New memberships and renewals received by November 30 will appear in our 2019 Directory. As most of you know, we do not send out renewal notices separate from the one you are receiving with this newsletter. We rely on your prompt attention.

As you can see from our 2018 Directory, we have enrolled many new Family Members. To those families we extend our gratitude and welcome! We hope that Dr. Kataoka's writings have inspired you and helped you through your difficult times. We invite you all to share experiences in this newsletter when you are so inclined. Articles and/or photos may be sent to Karen Hagberg khagberg1943@gmail.com for consideration. The Suzuki Piano Basics community welcomes your input!

Teachers: please collect your families' dues and send along with yours to Linda Nakagawa, Treasurer. And let's all encourage at least one colleague who is not yet a member to join our Foundation. There is another 10-Piano Concert in Japan coming up in April, and exciting workshops scheduled for next year. Take advantage of our Scholarship Program (Contact Hannah Hall correctthecause@gmail.com) as you plan ahead for these events.

Let's all re-dedicate ourselves to this wonderful teaching Method in this season of new beginnings.

Piano Basics Foundation Upcoming Workshops/Events

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

Teacher registration deadline: November 25

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>