

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

Ingredients: the Ability to Select the Best

By Haruko Kataoka

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When we think about preparing delicious food, the first most important thing is having the best ingredients. It is common knowledge. We hear about this important requirement even on television cooking shows. Ingredients must be the best, the freshest. Old, bruised, or dried up ingredients cannot be transformed into a wonderful meal even by the most skilled master chef.

Why is it, then, that we do not choose the most natural, fresh, and delicious tone when playing a piece on the piano? Tone is the basic ingredient when playing a piece, and yet everyone ignores the quality of their ingredients and seems to focus only on the tasks of learning notes and memorizing.

Let us research the most *important* ingredient: tone. In the case of food, we use our sense of taste to judge quality. With piano music, we use our sense of hearing to determine whether or not a tone is good (natural) or bad (unnatural). Every single day we must use our sense of hearing to develop the habit of listening to tone with concentration. Always listen, savoring with great care the tone that you make and the tone that others make. In doing this, we develop the ability to differentiate between the heartfelt, wonderful sound of music and the sound of a collision (in other words, bad tone).

A little advice at this point: to become proficient at playing the piano, we must nurture the habit of listening with great care. In order to develop our sense of taste for food, do we not eat delicious cuisine from many different sources? It is the same with the sense of hearing. First of all, listen to recordings of performances of the great masters. Search out really the best performances, in the same way you would search out fine restaurants, so you can become a person with the ability to choose really good, musical tone.

Humans are born with many potential abilities, but we must put in effort in order to develop them, otherwise they are useless to us. Our sense of hearing is one of these physical abilities. Practice listening with concentration every day, with your eyes closed and with a calm heart and mind, so that you will develop an ability that you can count on when you need it.

Without being able to listen, we cannot understand the quality of musical ingredients (the sound of music; musical tone), nor can we

understand a performer's interpretation of a piece or their skillful technique. (Someone without a developed sense of taste cannot judge the skill of a chef.) The practice of listening must be developed very carefully and from the time one is a beginner or it cannot be learned. After the ears themselves are trained to listen something more happens: you begin listening intuitively with your heart and soul. As a result, you begin to be able to add feeling and power to your natural, good sound. It is the same with cooking.

The chef creates a wonderful meal by using the best ingredients along with the heartfelt desire to give people a wonderful experience with food they can savor. It is the same with music. Just as a chef exercises his or her culinary skill, we must gather good sound to be able to perform a piece expressively, from the bottom of our heart, so no matter who is listening (or eating) they come away being revived and lucid, able to face the next day with new vitality. Furthermore, children, who are living the most wonderful, impressionable time of their lives, carry their experiences with them until they die. They thrive on the best nourishment.

People inevitably tend to be impressed merely by the size and scope of a job and lose sight of the quality of ingredients or the way things are put together. We neglect to put thought and research on the first stages of an endeavor.

We have the joy of experiencing wonderful music. With gratitude, let us think about good tone.

Australian in Matsumoto

By Hanna Silver

I found myself in Matsumoto in April by some good fortune. I'm a Suzuki piano teacher from Melbourne, Australia, and I won the Nehama Patkin Fellowship for Teachers' Professional Development. The award came in the form of a grant allowing me to pursue Suzuki professional development anywhere in the world, outside of my state of Victoria.

I just recently learned about Suzuki Piano Basics through Bruce Anderson when he visited us in Melbourne in 2018. My internet searches led me to find the 10-Piano Concert in Matsumoto, and I decided this was where I needed to be. I was (am? You never stop being) a Suzuki kid myself from age 3, and it was my first time in Matsumoto.

I had absolutely no idea what to expect from rehearsals, and my mind was blown. I knew that "you don't know what you don't know," and boy, did I discover things I did not know! I learned a lot from sitting through hours of rehearsals, listening to the teachers relentlessly work towards bringing the students closer and closer to perfection. Even in dress rehearsal the day before the concert they worked and continued to improve, and even from the first concert to the second. The grand finale, Liszt's La Campanella (translation from Italian is "The Little Bell") in the 2nd concert was electrifying! It was wonderful to be a

part of the audience, for us collectively to feel the exhilaration from the music in that moment.

I was totally humbled by the Japanese teachers' relationship with each other: one of complete trust, support and sharing, devoid of ego. One day, all the international teachers joined with the Japanese teachers to do "teachers research." We practiced Twinkles A and D together on the 10 pianos, and ran rehearsals on book 1 and 2 pieces for each other. I can tell you, it was one of the scariest things I've ever done in my life. But I appreciated the experience so much, and got so much out of it.

We had an outing to Dr Suzuki's grave and to his house. Being able to play on Dr Suzuki's piano was a very special moment. It is times like these where I think in wonder about the abilities that I have due to having learned via Suzuki method, and I feel emotional and am eternally grateful to him and to all my teachers.



Hanna Silver playing the piano in Dr. Suzuki's home, now a museum in Matsumoto. April, 2019.

The outing to Suwa city was wonderful. Getting to make our own signature stamps was a unique experience. And those strawberries! I can still taste them, so juicy.

I stayed with a host family in Matsumoto who were incredible and so much fun. They were a big part of my Matsumoto experience, and I am so grateful to them for welcoming me so warmly and giving me a home to stay in.

It was wonderful to make new Suzuki friends with the other international

teachers and students. Everyone was so open and sharing, which is one of the things I love about Suzuki. The Fellowship I won was in Nehama Patkin's name, one of my teaching mentors who loved to travel the world attending Suzuki events and making Suzuki friends. After my experience, I understand how she got that bug, and now maybe I have it too...

Massive thanks to all involved, I am grateful more than you know. It was a life changing experience for this Australian, and I will never forget it.

Making It Happen ***By Jacqueline Graham, Augusta, Georgia***

"I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear." –Nelson Mandela



Dr. Kataoka, Jacqueline Graham, and her son Josiah at Louisville Suzuki Piano Basics Institute, 1999.

Many years ago, I learned from Dr. Kataoka that if you truly want something bad enough you'll find a way to make it happen. I have lived by that principle, and have discovered that, if you declare it, be it mentally or verbally, and work in harmony with

the declaration, it can indeed become your reality. The thoughts and writings of Dr. Kataoka have a way of going straight to my heart.

As a previously single parent mother of 3 sons (*1 by marriage and adopted twins*) there were times throughout my teaching career that I wondered: 1) how I could financially maneuver attending masterclasses in the various locations each year, 2) how I could afford having a Suzuki Studio with two grand pianos, and 3) how on EARTH could I attend a 10-Piano Concert with my students in Japan. Despite those concerns, my belief in the messages of Dr. Suzuki and Dr. Kataoka and love for their way of teaching helped to push me forward to accomplish everything necessary to have a healthy and nurturing Suzuki studio. Eventually, "wondering how" transformed to sheer will and determination that my students and I receive the totality of the education extended to us from the Piano Basics Foundation Masterclasses and that we have the equipment needed to be a bona fide Suzuki Piano Studio.

Just recently I faced my biggest challenges. Although plans of attending the 10-Piano rehearsals and concert

in Japan came with great excitement, they also came with their share of worries. Financial sacrifices had to be made. I had had plenty of training in that category through years of single parenting. Next, I had always traveled with family. My biggest fear for this event was that I would be going it alone in a country that I have never been to before, and lacked knowledge on how to speak their language. If I were to get lost, how would I ask for help? I developed a real phobia about getting lost from the experience of having gotten lost on a hiking adventure with my children after starting out early in the morning and not finding our way back until it was nearly dark. Here I am, years later, reliving the fear of getting lost while in unknown territory with my “musical child” Robert. I did not want my fear to let him down. Dr. Kataoka’s encouragement was always there behind the fear, creating a longing in my heart that my student would not miss out on this fine opportunity as a result of my misgivings.

In addition, I made the decision not to accept the generous offer by the Japanese teachers to stay with a Japanese family. Due to serious health issues that run in my family, I live by a very strict diet and did not want to be a worry or inconvenience to others. I decided to make plans to stay on my own at a hotel. How would I shop for food or order in a restaurant? A dear friend lovingly advised me to work beyond my fears and encouraged me with the assurance that I would come

back a different person as a result of the experience.

I am delighted to say that Robert and I had the time of our lives! A great understanding came to me amid a sense of calm. The fact is we were never alone either before our journey or during it. First and foremost, our Heavenly Father was with us every step of the way. In addition to that, Robert and I were with a warm and loving musical family. It reminds me of the sense of community and togetherness that initially intrigued me when I began learning Suzuki piano and attending masterclasses.

Robert was with the best homestay ever! They took care of him in ways that I couldn’t have. I learned the valuable lesson of letting go, so that my student could grow and be totally immersed in his musical studies while in Japan, as well as embracing the beautiful culture. Robert had the opportunity to attend Japanese schools, lived like a king eating the finest of foods, and went on wonderful adventures with his homestay family! This relaxing and letting go also allowed me the opportunity to fully focus and learn during the rehearsals. There were loving and caring teachers by my side, making sure each day that I had no trouble getting to and from rehearsals, and that I was otherwise fine. They helped me visit places I wanted to see such as the Talent Education Institute and Shinichi Suzuki’s Memorial Hall.

My friend was right. I did come back a different person. I have always worked hard at teaching, yet, now I feel a deeper sense of responsibility to keep this unique education healthy and alive, both within and beyond my piano studio. Seeing the master teachers tirelessly at work during the 10-Piano rehearsals and Concert has put me on a whole new level. I know what I need to do to raise the bar for myself and for my students. Here’s to my new journey, going forward with unbridled confidence, anticipating my next 10-Piano Concert adventure.



From L to R: Fionnuala Witteman, student from the Netherlands, and teachers Hanna Silver, and Jacqueline Graham displaying the signature seals they made at a shop in Suwa City, Japan during their field trip, April, 2019.

Studying Tone

***By Karen Hagberg
From Matsumoto News
Volume 2, number 2, September 1989***

Before coming to Matsumoto, I must admit that, despite my extensive conservatory education, I knew virtually nothing about tone. Nor did I know the difference between a good and a poor piano, or between good and bad pianists. Whenever I heard Kataoka Sensei demonstrate various types of tone, I usually could not distinguish among them.

At that time, I knew a teacher who lamented, "Kataoka Sensei is *always* talking about tone, whatever *that* is. Whenever she begins to talk about tone, she loses me." This teacher stopped studying with Kataoka Sensei because she could not grasp a concept as "elusive" as tone. Fortunately, I felt fascinated by this mysterious thing called tone, and I wondered why I knew next-to-nothing about it after all my years of studying music.

It all seems incredible looking back on my previous music education. How can a student learn music without studying tone? Just as form is the essence of architecture, shape of sculpture, line of drawing, color of painting, movement of dance: tone is the essence of music. And yet I was taught by conservatory professors that a note on a piano sounds the same no matter how it is produced, and that it is possible for someone to

practice on a terrible instrument and then to produce a fine performance simply by playing the recital on a good piano.

In the same conservatory context, I was taught to judge performances on *everything but* tone production: interpretation, performance practice, technical skill, etc. During those years I was fortunate enough to hear recitals by Horowitz and Rubinstein, which were obviously wonderful, but I never really knew *why* they sounded better than others, let alone had any idea *how* they played that way. I hope the situation in music education is better for other instruments. But where the piano is concerned, most of us have been taught that we are at the mercy of the limitations of the specific instrument and of the piano technician for tone production—that we pianists have little or no responsibility for our own sound. In retrospect, this seems truly unbelievable.

In Matsumoto, both Suzuki Sensei and Kataoka Sensei are teaching me how to listen for tone before anything else. Every morning Suzuki Sensei teaches a group class to 20-30 trainees. Frequently, he asks individual students to play a note or a short phrase on their instrument and then he plays the same thing on the student's violin. His tone is always noticeably better. He then observes as he hands back the instrument, "Nothing wrong with the *violin!*"

Kataoka Sensei make a similar point in our group concerts. We may play anything we choose, and so there is usually a great variety of pieces and a wide range of performance ability and experience. My traditional training encourages me to focus on the difficulty of the pieces, who can execute the more challenging pieces well, who makes mistakes, who

seems nervous, etc. But often Kataoka Sensei's only comment at the conclusion of such a concert is, "Please notice that everybody played the same piano."

Of course we all played the same piano! What is so interesting about that? At first I wondered why she did not point out other things. Performing is difficult for me, and I was looking for some advice, some clue which would help me learn how Sensei's students perform so well. But clearly this *was* the clue—I just did not understand at first. Now I always marvel at how the same piano can sound so different when played by different people. And I have begun to understand that the ability to perform easily begins with the ability to listen very carefully to one's own tone.

Kataoka Sensei also encourages her students to listen to lots of recorded music. While in graduate school I had at my disposal the best recording library in the country but I was never encouraged to listen to performances comparatively. Incredibly, there was some belief that students should not listen to recordings of pieces we were practicing for fear of copying someone else's playing. (I no longer "fear" sounding exactly like de Larrocha or Horowitz!)

How many of us have taken the time to listen to a piece played by several different performers? When I began doing this, they all sounded good. After all, professional recordings usually feature nearly flawless performances. I may have preferred

one performer's tempo or another pianist's ornaments, but before listening for tone I did not really understand why and how a world-class performer is distinguished from someone who can simply play all the notes. I used to believe that lots of people could play like Horowitz, but that Horowitz had something extra-musical in his favor. Maybe he had the best manager and publicity agent; maybe he had special stage presence; maybe he chose the right repertoire for his given audience; maybe he was just lucky. But what Horowitz and other truly great performers can do is to create beautiful tone. If I listen to a recording of Horowitz and lesser performers many times over and over, I can begin to hear this tone clearer and clearer.

Finally, after hearing tone in the playing of others (which is always easier), I could begin to listen for my own tone, which started out being very bad indeed. It is no wonder I had not wanted to listen to it.

Kataoka Sensei teaches tone in every lesson. At first, I could not hear what she was pointing out to me. Gradually it became clear that I was being taught not to practice the *pieces* I was assigned, but I was being taught to use the pieces to practice *tone*. This is how and why the trainees in Matsumoto can spend up to two years on Books 1 & 2, the most elementary pieces in the Suzuki Method. One needs lots of room in which to practice tone. In the beginning it cannot be done in pieces containing too many notes.

Having learned basic lessons about tone, everything else then seems possible. This explains how we trainees generally move from the end of Book 2 to Bach's *Italian Concerto*, skipping over Books 3-7 altogether. If a person can produce tone in a simple piece, this ability can be employed to play a more difficult piece. The technique used to produce tone in the simple piece is all the technique one needs to play anything.

Tone may seem elusive as a concept. It cannot be seen or easily described, and so it must be learned and taught in non-conceptual ways. Those of us who have learned only in a highly logical context have skipped

over, or ignored altogether, the very essence of music, which is tone. What I have learned so far in Japan is that playing music is so much easier for me if I start with its essence and build from there, rather than trying to attain tone after hours of work on everything but tone (which is actually impossible).

Tone is the essence of music. Tone must be the basic, fundamental beginning step—the very first consideration—in our own learning and in all our teaching.

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 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 Foundation Upcoming Workshops/Events

July 22 - 26, 2019

St. Louis, Missouri

St. Louis Suzuki Piano Basics Workshop
With Rae Kate Shen & Bruce Anderson
Contact Patty Eversole 314-837-1881
paeversole@yahoo.com
<http://stlsuzukipiano.tripod.com/>

August 2-6, 2019

Sacramento, California

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

NOTICE: There will be no August workshops with the Japanese teachers in the U.S. in August 2020, due to travel issues caused by Tokyo Olympics.

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>