

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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Next Deadline: October 31, 2019

To Achieve Something Worthwhile, Do It Over and Over Again

By Haruko Kataoka

From the Matsumoto Suzuki Piano Newsletter

Vol.7 No.1, June 1, 1997

Translated by Chisa Aoki

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From the moment of birth, human beings begin to accumulate the performance of repetitive tasks. First of all, are the basic abilities that necessitate the mere feat of existence: sleeping, waking, eating. [We think nothing of doing such things repeatedly], however, when people are ordered to do something over and over, they begin to question the value of this: "Do the same, monotonous thing over and over? It's stupid and pointless. I'm bored to death, and it makes me want to quit doing this dull, uninspiring stuff. I'd rather start something more difficult and sophisticated."

So what is the reason to do the same thing over and over?

"...accumulate enough repetition to nurture the very ability to do repetition."

To answer this question, first, people must be absolutely able to differentiate between what they know intellectually and what they can actually do. When I was young I believed in the mistaken notion that *understanding*, something meant that I was able to do it. When my mother persistently reminded me of the same things over and over, I would think to myself, "I know this already! You're annoying me! Why do you have to keep repeating yourself?" However, when we go into the world as adults, with adult responsibilities, we come to realize what a tremendous mistake it is to think that way. For example, we discover that it is really good to rise early, not to be lazy, to work hard, etc.

However, when we go into the world as adults, with adult responsibilities, we come to realize what a tremendous mistake it is to think that way. For example, we discover that it is really good to rise early, not to be lazy, to work hard, etc. Yet even though everybody may agree on these values, they are not easily accomplished. What can we do to be able to accomplish them?

The answer is easy. You must actually *do* things over and over, without thinking about them too much. You must use not only your intellect but also your body, whether you are cleaning the house, or practicing the piano, or cooking. If you do the same thing over and over every day, little by little, gradually your body will learn something about the movements within the context of a given activity. Eventually you will be able to perform that activity at its basic, first level, automatically without even thinking. At that point, you can begin to be able to realize the second level. If you continue to repeat this activity further without finding it tiresome, then you will reach the third level. The result of all this repetition is that you begin to nurture an ability, and you may then continue to build up to the next higher level. It is not possible to accomplish such things by intellectualizing or with fleeting thoughts. This principle applies to any area of study or work. There is no one in the whole world who is able to develop an ability by merely thinking about it.

The one physical activity that we all practice perennially, month after month, day after day, is something that will remain with us for the rest of our lives. This is our native language, the *mother tongue*. Since birth we have been listening to it constantly, and we have developed the fluency that comes with speaking the same things repeatedly, countless times, [without even giving it much thought]. It is not something we ever forget, as long as we are alive. [It is a true ability.]

I saw a program on television a while back that featured an artist considered to be a human national treasure. He spoke of the time when he helped to do chores at a temple when he was a student. Every morning, his routine was to clean the long path leading

from the gate to the main temple. He said that the repetition of this daily task had been very valuable for the creation of his outstanding ceramics throughout his career.

Please, everyone, require your children to do many boring and monotonous chores every day. Let us nurture our children to be able to do laborious, sweaty work without complaint, resentment, or resistance. Unlike adults, children are unconcerned with planning for the future. Adults who are part of children's lives (parents) should provide them with repetitive work until they become proficient at being able to accumulate enough repetition to nurture the very ability to do repetition. We must help them to achieve this. Please do not forget! The ability to use the body to do cumulative, monotonous tasks repeatedly is a crucial element for future success.

Suzuki Student Wins International Competition

By Janet Kaido



Parker Van Ostrand performing at the Winner's Recital of the Philadelphia International Piano Competition, August 11, 2019. Photo by Juliette Luong.



Competition winner Parker Van Ostrand with Philadelphia teachers (L to R) Janet Kaido, Carole Mayer's, and Jane Guerin. Photo by Juliette Luong..

This past August was an exciting one in Philadelphia for one Suzuki student and several Suzuki teachers. Some of us here got to enjoy hearing Linda Nakagawa's student from Sacramento, 16-year-old Parker Van Ostrand, in master classes and recitals as part of the Philadelphia Young Pianists' Academy, an auditioned 10-day festival of lessons, master classes, and concerts, including the Philadelphia International Piano Competition. Twenty-two students, ages 10-25, from around the world participated in the event.

Parker took first place in the Junior Division competition and also won the full scholarship to return to next year's festival. And, he won the Best Concerto Award, even over the senior division winner!

Hearing different students throughout the week, all of whom were extremely advanced, well-prepared, and with a lot of mature musical expression, we could hear why Parker's playing stood out. He was praised by the judges for his clear sound in particular; more than any other student we heard, the melody and any interesting inner voices were all so clearly audible, each with its own color

and character, while less important voices stayed out of the way. One teacher Parker studied with, Dong Thai Son, attributed this to his outstanding finger technique (dare we say, "Twinkles"?), saying, during his master class lesson, "Bravo, your piano sound is very good. I really like your touch and the quality of your touch...Your melody is very clear and beautiful. I can hear all the different voices."

While the other students were also truly amazing, accomplished pianists, they didn't have the same strong rhythmic sense or the ability to clearly sing out a melody over the accompaniment. Many teachers expressed admiration for Parker's tone and clarity, along with admiration for his teacher. Parker has practiced endless Twinkles, down-ups, and hands apart, slowly, with the metronome, for years. All that hard work has paid off!

Congratulations to Parker and Linda!

It's All About the Breath

By Janet Kaido

It took me 15 years to figure it out. But, in retrospect, it's clearly what drew me to the study and teaching of Piano Basics in the Suzuki Method. With roots as an oboist (from 7th grade until sometime in college, my plan had been to be an orchestral oboist), I recall my high school oboe teacher saying that his teacher, John de Lancie (Sr.—Jr. was the Hollywood actor), the late principal oboist of The Philadelphia Orchestra and director of The Curtis Institute of Music, could teach music to a lamppost. These memories came rushing back to me one afternoon last February while listening to a regional honors recital, performed by music students (overwhelmingly but not exclusively pianists) who had received the honor of performing through an MTNA audition.

The performances were largely very well polished, with few note mistakes, basically even tempi, and an abundance of musical expression, mostly quite stylistically inoffensive. But, something was just missing. Accurate performances with admirably even, controlled 16th-notes left me feeling frustratingly wanting, and in spite of plenty of dynamic contrast, the lack of a clear melody tone to sing out over the harmonies (or, through the harmonies, in the case of an inner or lower voice having the melody) just made the music sound, well, lacking.

... seeing how they used Twinkle A to make the opening notes of, "Little Playmates," clear and even in each hand made light bulbs go on, no, fireworks go off, all over my brain.



Janet Kaido. Photo by Erica Corbo.

My beginnings as a Suzuki piano teacher were pretty awful, to be honest. It wasn't due to the setting—I was fortunate to have access to two (albeit mostly out of tune and not in top repair) pianos in a teaching studio at a community music school, one an old Steinway grand, the other a neglected Mason and Hamlin upright, quality instruments in their day before the

university dumped them as old has-beens into the satellite program's teaching studio. But, in truth, I had no idea what I was doing. I took comfort only in the fact that, if my students weren't studying with me, they would likely be with someone even more clueless, who may not even have a music degree, or at least the sense of musical tone, expression, and style that got me through my own studies at Curtis as an oboe major. But, I also knew that I knew terrifyingly little about how to really play or teach piano well, though I had studied from age 4 through 7th grade (and hadn't really practiced since). I did study and still play a significant amount of organ, so I definitely still knew my way around on a keyboard—but, well, let's just say it's *quite* different.

... Basics teaching...is not only the clarity of sound, but the sense of "Down-Up," particularly "Down," that is the breath in music...

It was after at least two years of really quite aimless teaching, at a master class with Karen Hagberg teaching my students, where things started to make sense. I felt like my underwear was out in my front yard on a clothesline for all to see. She so graciously steered those poor, ill-informed kids in a better direction, and seeing her help my students stay up over the keys, and then hearing the sound that resulted, was nothing short of transformative. I am so fortunate to be in Philadelphia, where

there is a large enough community of teachers to have workshops with 30-year-plus master teachers, many of whom went through the teacher training program in Matsumoto, sometimes several times a year.

The next level of "Eureka," was watching Keiko Ogiwara Sensei and Keiko Kawamura Sensei teach students every day for a week at the Louisville Institute the one year they were there, so long ago now...possibly it was 2005? I don't recall. In any case, seeing how they used Twinkle A to make the opening notes of, "Little Playmates," clear and even in each hand made light bulbs go on, no, fireworks go off, all over my brain. Suddenly, it all made sense—at least, more than ever before. (I now know enough to realize that every time I have a lesson with one of the Sensei's, it will

...used to have his students watch string players to get a feel for the visual "Down," and "Up," of the bow ... and listen to singers to observe their breath and phrasing, how they emphasize the peak of the phrase and the important words in the music in a natural way...You can bet "Down inflection" and "Up inflection" were major themes for decades of wind students.

all make sense all over again, in a new way, and yet reveal so much more unknown in spite of that!)

Even so, only in the past year or so have I realized that what connects my sense of music, from the oboe study to Basics teaching, as well as my enjoyment (or

lack thereof) of performances, is not only the clarity of sound, but the sense of "Down-Up," particularly "Down," that is the breath in music, that we specifically teach. I am left to wonder whether so many others are left apparently without that specific teaching, perhaps to use that sense if they happen to have it naturally, otherwise to play without it, with all the beats in the measure having the same feeling, without meter, cycle, flow, breath.

I'm drawn into the way we research, for the body balance and for the finger motion and strength to get a truly singing sound...along with the continuing practice of Down-Ups to really ground the feeling of a cyclic meter into our bodies so that we can make a natural, moving, breathing sound to support that singing melody: because this is what makes music, music.

At Curtis, my oboe teacher's teacher and predecessor, John de Lancie, used to have his students watch string players to get a feel for the visual "Down," and "Up," of the bow (which my teacher in high school said, with amusement, that he subsequently learned that they work so hard to mask, as often they must get an "up," sound with a down bow, and a "down" sound with an up bow!) and listen to singers to observe their breath and phrasing, how they emphasize the peak of the phrase and the important words in the music in a natural way. When I had the opportunity to study with Mr. de Lancie at the Aspen Festival (so many

years ago), he indeed instructed about a "down inflection," and an "up inflection." While I am not sure what pianists at Curtis were or are taught in terms of singing or breath in the music, this quality in wind playing can make wind instrument Curtis grads recognizable to one another far away from the Mother Ship: it was and is still the oboe teacher who taught the wind class, which was essentially a sectional for that week's orchestra repertoire (different pieces every week, as in a professional orchestra) for the flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, and horns. So, that time was an opportunity for the teaching of general musicianship as well as details about the repertoire. You can bet "Down inflection" and "Up inflection" were major themes for decades of wind students.

Playing with that clear melody, and with "Down," and "Up,"...is what makes music universally natural and comforting, and sensible to us as humans, regardless of culture or language.

Not until hearing otherwise quite good performances without a clear melody tone or a sense of meter, without the alternation of deep and light beats, did I understand why I unquestioningly teach the way I do. I'm drawn into the way we research, for the body balance and for the finger motion and strength to get a truly singing sound (even oboists—*wind players*, who truly create our own sound by chirping on reeds and taking minuscule scrapings to refine the tone until that

"crow" sounds right—need to listen to singers to improve this sense!), along with the continuing practice of Down-Ups to really ground the feeling of a cyclic meter into our bodies so that we can make a natural, moving, breathing sound to support that singing melody: because this is what makes music, music.

Playing with that clear melody, and with "Down," and "Up," (the latter even with music that may be un-tuned percussion only without melody!) is what makes music universally natural and comforting, and sensible to us as humans, regardless of culture or language. In teaching Suzuki Piano Basics, the aural and tactile sense of the musical experience comes first, and the focus is, from the

beginning, on tone and that sense of meter. These are the qualities of music that touch our natural human sensibilities but *may* still need explaining to execute well, and they can be taught, even to a "lamppost!" Dr. Suzuki believed that basically any child could learn them, and through studying Basics, without question, we hold the key to that possibility.

Be sure to read the previous article on p. 3 about one of Linda Nakagawa's students who attended a prestigious piano festival this August and took top prizes for his exemplification of these skills, which made his playing really stand out over many other otherwise very excellent performances!

Suzuki Piano Basics Scholarships

(Still available for February workshop in Orange County!)

Where can I apply?

Application forms and guidelines are posted on the current Piano Basics website:

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

Click on the tab marked "Scholarships"

When is the deadline?

There is no longer a deadline! Scholarship funds are available for the current year, but ONLY until the annual amount budgeted has been depleted. First come, first served. After that time, applications will be considered for workshops the following year.

How can I give to the Scholarship Fund?

If you would like to make a donation, simply add it to your SPBF renewal, or mail your gift to:

Piano Basics Foundation, 242 River Acres Dr.,
Sacramento, CA 95831.

Please note "Scholarship" in the memo portion of your check.

Your donation, no matter how small, fosters community and helps the world of Piano Basics grow ever better. Without your gifts, SPBF will not be able to grant this great opportunity. Thank you again for your continued generosity.

For all questions pertaining to scholarships, or if you would like to join the Scholarship Committee, please contact Hannah Hall, Chair: correctthecause@gmail.com or 502-415-5122.

Invitation to Orange County Workshop

Dear Friends,

We are hosting the Japanese Teachers again in Orange County, CA. for a Piano Basics Workshop and you are all invited to attend. The dates are Thursday-Monday, February 13-17, 2020. The Early Bird registration deadline is November 15th. After that, registration fees go up.

This is coming out early to you so that you can start looking into airfares and accommodations. Please go on our SMAC-OC website for more information at smac-oc.org.

I hope you can join us!

Rae Kate Shen

Editor's Note: Due to travel difficulties around the Tokyo Olympics next summer, there will be no August workshop in the U.S. with the Japanese teachers. This Orange County workshop will be the only one in 2020, so make your plans accordingly. To apply for scholarship assistance, please contact Hannah Hall (correctthecause@gmail.com).



After the Friendship Concert review at the previous Orange County workshop.
Photo by Ken Matsuda.



Potluck Thanksgiving dinner at previous Orange County workshop.
Photo by Ken Matsuda.

Piano Basics Foundation Upcoming Workshops/Events

**February 13-17, 2020
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

August 2020
NOTICE: There will be no August workshop in the U.S. next year with the Japanese teachers because of travel difficulties caused by the Tokyo Olympics. Plan on Orange County in February!

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>