

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: June 15, 2020

*The
Potential
of
Human Beings*

By Haruko Kataoka

From the Matsumoto Suzuki Piano Newsletter

Vol. 11, No 12, May 7, 2002

Translated by Chisa Aoki and

Teri Paradero

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People tend to study or work within their own various capabilities and limitations. They resign themselves into thinking that they have a finite capacity for the amount of knowledge they can absorb and that they have given their best effort. Is this really the truth? When I was young, I used to wonder if what I was doing was really the best I could do.

Such questioning was the result of an experience I had when I was eighteen years old. It was during the war. Late at night a bomb from a U.S. fighter plane had been dropped about a couple of houses or so away from my home. Those houses were ablaze. My older sister and younger brother went to help extinguish the fire. I was certain that the fire would continue to spread and engulf our home as well. So I was in charge of moving important belongings to the air-raid shelter. This took two hours. Thankfully, our home was spared from the blaze. The next day, we decided to return our belongings back to our home. Surprisingly, it took all day to do this. It took two hours to put our belongings in the shelter, but all day to bring them back? Even now, I wonder what enabled me to function in those two hours. Superhuman response during a fire has been a topic of wonder since the olden days.

About a month ago speed skater and medalist, Hiroyashi Shimizu, shared something wonderful during a sports newscast. His goal yet again, until the next Olympics in four years, would be to devote himself to prepare for the Olympics, not because he wanted a medal, not because he wanted to

break a record, but to challenge his own human ability. He believes that human beings have an incredible potential, but utilize only a small portion. His challenge was to use that unused potential no matter what hardship he would encounter.

How magnificent! Hearing this was deeply moving for me. Even at my age, there was still potential left in me. I felt that this gave me the strength to endeavor to use my potential as long as I am alive.

Being in the field of music makes me so aware that all the world-renowned maestros/virtuosos never forget to endeavor to challenge their potential.

I personally experienced this challenge during the rehearsals of the 10-Piano Concert. Certainly, this also happens during regular lessons. For instance, when I ask my students for a big sound or a very little sound while wondering if I'm asking too much for their ability, I will continue to ask even more insistently in different ways. Low and behold, there are times that they surprisingly reveal their potential to produce just the sound I am asking for.

Children possess a very high potential. However, those in charge of their care give up too easily or think erroneously that much cannot be expected from them because they are just children. As a result, their potential is at a standstill, limiting how much they can learn and therefore, leaving them in a sorry state.

Because children do not possess motivation and do not of their own accord apply their potential,

adults around them must provide the kind of environment where they are encouraged to further their potential. NEVER GIVE UP! Please persevere and never give up. While enduring life's struggles tenaciously and patiently exerting effort and becoming aware that they possess tremendous

potential, human lives will be sure to shine brilliantly.

Suzuki Sensei often used to say, "You can't do it? It's not that you can't do it, it's only that you haven't had enough practice."

It just plainly occurs to me that we still possess plenty of untried potential. It's such a genuinely happy feeling.

Dear Teacher Members:

We are living in unprecedented times, and I'm sure that each and every one of you is experiencing a unique set of challenges.

This newsletter is being delivered by email, assuming that our members are not physically meeting with students at this time. We request that teachers, in turn, forward this email to each of your families who are members of Suzuki Piano Basics Foundation. Communication among ourselves is more important than ever during this pandemic. Please be responsible to collect and submit the \$25 annual dues to our Treasurer Linda Nakagawa (242 River Acres Drive, Sacramento CA 95839) for any families who are not yet members.

With communication in mind, we invite each and every one of you, including students and parents, to submit a paragraph or two for a column to appear in our next newsletter entitled "Covid Snapshots" in which you may share experiences, teaching or otherwise, with photographs when appropriate, during this time. Without personal contact at lessons, workshops and meetings, this written and photographic communication is more important than ever. Please all participate. Send your thoughts by June 15 to me at khagberg1943@gmail.com. Please state whether you are a teacher, parent, or student and your location. Thank you in advance.

In the meantime, it is my sincere hope that you all may remain well and protected until this global disaster has abated. Karen Hagberg, Editor

MESSAGE FROM A 10-YEAR-OLD GIRL

Speech by Ogiwara Sensei after the Friendship Concert at the Suzuki Piano Basics Teacher Training Workshop, Orange County, California, February 16, 2020

We are so happy to be able to come to Orange County and see you again this year. In Matsumoto, where we live, we usually get a lot of snow in the winter. But this year, we have been experiencing dry weather and a winter without snow. I wonder if we are affected by an abnormal meteorological phenomenon. I think winter should be winter, so people can enjoy skiing and skating. My grandchildren are disappointed because they cannot do that this year.

There is a national newspaper company called Asahi Shinbun in Japan. I am a fan of one of its columns called "Young Generations" and enjoy reading it. Here is a recent, interesting letter to the editor.

This contributor is a ten-year-old who is studying violin.

It reads: "I have a dream. It is to become a violinist who can perform throughout the world. I started violin when I was around three years old. Right now, I a

preparing for a violin competition and practicing about two hours a day. I like the sound of the violin's high register. My violin teacher always tells me that unless I possess Konjo, I am not going to improve.

"I looked up the word Konjo in a dictionary and found the definition as 'strong will power.' Konjo in Japanese kanji characters contains the word "root." I have determined that I am going to develop strong roots underground now. Then, during my junior high-school years, I will grow a thick strong stem and a lot of leaves that won't break no matter what happens. I think, Konjo means to keep doing my best in order for me to be able to bloom a big flower by the time I am in high-school and grow into adulthood.

"Probably I won't become a 'genius violinist,' but I will be a Konjo violinist, and someday I would like to stand on a world stage. There, I would like to perform Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto." That was what she wrote. I was very impressed that there is a ten-year-old girl who practices with this kind of this kind of thinking.

We play a different instrument, but by studying how to play piano, we are able to acquire patience, concentration, tenacity, and the will power to finish a job and to grow as human beings. Because of this, our children will be able to display their abilities in various fields when they become adults.

Practicing every day with effort is equivalent to developing strong roots, and making a thick, solid stem that will not break no matter what happens. I am looking forward to your future. Thank you.



At Orange County International Teacher Research Workshop, February 2020. L to R: Jill Austin, Renee Eckis, Linda Nakagawa, Kawamura Sensei, Ogiwara Sensei.



Charlotte Howenstein, seated, with, clockwise, Karen Huffman, Keiko Kawamura Sensei, and Keiko Ogiwara Sensei at Orange County Suzuki Teacher Research Workshop, February 2020.

First Timer Reports from Orange County

By Charlotte Howenstein

My Suzuki teacher training began in 2013 and I have registered Book training every summer since 2015, but I waited to attend a workshop featuring the Japanese teachers until February 2020. I wondered, how would it be different? What am I going to get out of this? The answer: so much more than I expected.

This workshop is not simply supplemental training, it is learning at the fundamental level for what we do: teach beautiful tone. Truly, you have to hear it to understand the value of this workshop. I have learned so much from my SAA Book training and lesson observation, but these five days of observation really solidified all of that training into practice.

I think I expected to get answers regarding my shortcomings as a teacher, but really I was given tools to elevate my teaching. I came away with clear ideas about how to improve my Twinkles and Down/Ups to create beautiful tone, produced by a softer hand.

The way the Japanese teachers produce their consistent tone with seemingly effortless technique is awe-inspiring. Seeing how they listen so carefully and can make a small suggestion that creates a big difference in the technique and tone is so rewarding.

Upon my return to daily teaching, I thought I might be overwhelmed with frustration at what my students lacked. On the contrary, I have been more inspired and empowered because, not only can I hear in my mind the tone produced by Ogiwara Sensei and Kawamura Sensei, I have more sensitive ears and concrete ideas for small corrections using the Twinkles and Down/Ups.

It was an amazing opportunity to meet the teachers from Japan and I added a whole new community of encouraging teachers to my world. Budgeting the time to be out of my studio mid-February was well worth it and rejuvenating. I needed this.

Having heard it so many times in observation, "We must teach the body to remember," I know that my memory of this beautiful tone can fade over time, so I must practice and attend this workshop again. If you have not yet attended a workshop, or if it has been a while since you did, come refresh your ears and be. Hope to see you at a Piano Basics Workshop featuring the Japanese teachers next year.

Thoughts After the Tenth National Chopin Competition Miami, Florida February 22-March 1, 2020

By Karen Hagberg

Just before the pandemic descended upon us, I was lucky enough to travel to Miami to watch this competition from beginning to end. I went with Linda Nakagawa, teacher of Parker Van Ostrand who, at age sixteen, was the youngest competitor (age range 16-30).

This prestigious competition happens once every five years. Open only to citizens of the United States, it is a feeder competition to the world-renowned International Chopin Competition in Warsaw, Poland (scheduled this year on October 2-23, but now postponed until the fall of 2021). Being chosen, by audition, to be one of twenty-six competitors is a great accomplishment and an honor in itself.

The audition required a video performance, recorded all at the same time with no editing, of the repertoire required in the Preliminary Round along with two

Mazurkas. The competition itself consisted of four rounds, each longer than the previous one, with pieces chosen from a specified list. Here is the program Parker chose:

Preliminary Round:

Etude, C Major, Op.10, no.1

Etude, B minor, Op.25, no.10

Nocturne, C# minor, Op. 27, no.1

Scherzo, no.2, Bb minor, Op.31

Quarter Finals:

Ballade, no.2, F Major, Op.38

Waltz, Eb Major, Op.18

Andante spianato et Grande Polonaise brillante, Op.22

Scherzo, no.4, E Major, Op.54 Semi Finals:

Sonata, Bb minor, Op.35

Mazurkas, Op.59

Fantasy, F minor, Op.49

Variations Brillantes, Op.12

Final:

Piano Concerto, E minor, Op.11

Other competitors included undergraduates and graduates of Juilliard, Eastman, Curtis, Manhattan, Peabody, and the New England Conservatory among others. Upon reading the

various biographies of the contestants, one might have thought that Parker was out of his league.

Despite this, Parker won third place overall and also the prize for best Sonata. He is now eligible to compete in Warsaw. There was a group of judges who felt he should have won first place. In other words, he was recognized as one of the best, if not the best, of the 26 contestants. And one might ask oneself how the youngest competitor, still a junior in high school, was able to do this. What set him apart from these rivals with years more experience, from our major conservatories?

Judges from this and from many earlier competitions along the way always mention Parker's sound: how clear it is, and how he is able to project good tone at all dynamic levels. They note his singing melody and his ability to bring out inner voices. They applaud the quality of his touch and his legato. They say his performances project power and inspiration. As I listened to his program next to the other competitors I heard so much more room in his music, even

though he often played at faster tempi. He had more varied sounds, and a much wider dynamic range.

Often, I felt that the other competitors, as accomplished as all of them certainly were, produced sound that was, in one way or other, unpleasant. Parker distinguishes himself by producing beautiful sound, no matter the tempo, no matter the dynamic level, no matter the texture of the music.

Parker began his study with Linda Nakagawa when he was five years old. For the first several years he had the advantage of having annual lessons with teachers from Japan at workshops in Sacramento and elsewhere, and performing in 10-Piano Concerts both in Sacramento and Japan. I recall some of his early lessons with Keiko Kawamura where she did nothing but relax his posture with down-ups and talk about the importance of helping him keep a natural body as he learned pieces seemingly overnight. In rehearsals for 10-Piano Concerts, pint-sized Parker performed with much older students, participating in rehearsals where the focus was on listening and creating beautiful tone. Parker, his mother, and observing teachers witnessed advanced Japanese students practice endless repetitions until their piece became completely synchronized and until their tone became truly wonderful. All of this experience, and with the advice of the Japanese teachers, convinced Parker's mother to continue lessons with Linda even after he began competing and studying with other teachers who operate in the world of piano competitions.

In other words, Parker, to this day, as advanced as he is, still studies Suzuki Piano Basics: the study of tone production with the most natural body.

I enjoy talking with Linda about Parker's lessons. I have to credit her with the tenacity, the conviction, the patience it takes to teach a student like Parker at this advanced level. Could I have done it? Could I have required him to play Twinkle D or Mary Had a Little Lamb or a slow scale for an entire hour in order to work on his legato? Could I have spent the lesson on the first note or first measure of a long concerto? Could I have assigned hands-alone, slow practice in short section of a Chopin Etude and then spent the lesson doing these countless repetitions with him, realizing that, as still just a kid Parker cannot be expected to go home and actually do this on his own? Could I have singled out a short passage in a very long piece and asked, "What am I supposed to be hearing here?" over and over insisting, "I still don't hear it," until he has played it a hundred

times or more, trying to expose the hidden sound that will give the piece more depth and meaning?

I don't mean to be suggesting that Suzuki Piano Basics take full credit for Parker's awesome accomplishments, and I am certain that Linda would be the last one to take credit. But this kind of work on tone production, as most of us who are conservatory-trained know full well, is rare, especially with students who are learning and performing new repertoire all the time. This was obvious in Miami, where I was wishing all of you who have been studying Basics for years would have had this amazing opportunity to study tone. You may listen to the various rounds of the competition on YouTube by searching Miami Chopin Competition. Bios of the contestants may be seen by going to www.chopin.org. Click on Competition and then on Meet the Contestants on the drop-down menu. Enjoy!

Upcoming Events:

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in the foreseeable future we cannot predict whether or not anticipated events will take place. To the best of our understanding, events scheduled for the summer months of 2020 have all been cancelled. Please all take care of yourselves.



Finalists in the 10th National Chopin Competition, Miami, Florida. March 1, 2020. Parker Van Ostrand on R.

Piano Basics Membership Meeting February 16, 2020

Attending:

Dorifel Acoba, Jill Austin, Loretta Benson, Leah Brammer, Rita Burns, Renee Eckis, Trevor Emmons, Charlotte Howenstein, Shitian Huang, Karen Huffman, Mei Ihara, Janet Kaido, Tomomi Kojima, Linda Nakagawa, Carol Novak, Melody Schwarz, Rae Kate Shen, Connie Snyder, Naomi Wysong

Renee Eckis opened the meeting.

Welcome to new teachers attending the workshop. Linda Nakagawa described the work of Piano Basics, to publish the

newsletter and disperse information about Piano Basics and to support workshops with the teachers from Matsumoto. We also provide scholarship to new teachers, though there haven't yet been any takers.

Last meeting's minutes:

Loretta Benson moved and Karen Huffman seconded, to accept the old minutes

Treasurer's Report: Linda Nakagawa reports \$12,848.43 as of December 19.

Current slate of officers:

Renee Eckis, President
Jackie Block, Vice President
Karmalita Bawar, Secretary
Linda Nakagawa, Treasurer

Nominations were opened. None were added. Loretta Benson moved to accept current slate of officers. Motion was seconded. Slate of officers accepted unanimously.

Scholarship Report:

No applicants. Originally designed for new teachers, it would be open for anyone. Members should let others (members as well as new teachers) know that it's available (just for member teachers who will also be a member the subsequent year) to apply for, for workshops with the teachers from Matsumoto or to go to Japan. Contact Hannah Hall if interested or for more information about what might be covered. (Scholarship fund currently contains \$1400 general; \$787 in Burt Mayers fund.) If older students are members and going to a teacher workshop as prospective teachers, they may be eligible.

Unfinished Business:

--Promoting membership. Membership assistant Patricia Pritchard is helping remind members to pay their dues/renew.
--Family and student memberships—beneficial for families of students to be involved. (Family dues are \$25.) Families enjoy the newsletter articles and information about upcoming workshops. Families must be members to attend a Basics workshop with Matsumoto teachers. (Names but not addresses are listed in the directory.) Some teachers raise rates to cover the cost of the family membership.

--Ways to encourage new teachers and encourage past members to be involved. (Two new teachers attending this workshop found it on the SMAC-OC website.)

–Current members could be assigned to reach out to former members to invite them to continue to come to workshops and study.

–Current members could be assigned to mentor new teachers and particularly welcome them and introduce them at workshops.

New Ideas:

Mei Ihara suggested saving \$5 of each family membership towards a scholarship fund for students.

Website:

Still the old version. Bruce Boiney reported that Ken Wilburn was still willing to do the website, so a new one was put on hold. An offer to help Bruce with a new website was solicited: Karen Huffman and Melody Schwarz agreed to assist. One issue that should be addressed is searchability on Google (one has to enter Suzuki Piano Basics and know what to search for, in order to find the website).

New Business – Future workshops:

Jackie Graham in Georgia has volunteered to host a February 2021 workshop. A west coast location is also sought; the Senseis should be invited by June for a February workshop. It's not too early to think about summer 2021. Rae Kate motioned to adjourn; Carol Novak seconded. Meeting adjourned.
Respectfully submitted by Janet Kaido
On behalf of Kamalita Bawar.