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ABOUT SUZUKI is a series of publications dealing with the philosophy of early childhood education developed by Shinichi Suzuki. Beginning with the successful “mother tongue” approach to the teaching of violin and musicianship to very young children, his methodology has been expanded to include cello, viola, string ensemble, piano and flute. The Suzuki emphasis on teaching the whole child in the way most natural to each child has gained worldwide acceptance. Suzuki teachers can be found in every corner of the globe, and educators have become increasingly interested in comparing the Suzuki approach to other pioneering trends in childhood education. “About Suzuki” publications make the exciting and thought-provoking concepts of this international forum equally accessible to educators, parents, students, and the general reader.

HARUKO KATAOKA is one of the world’s leading authorities on the Suzuki Piano School. Through her teaching and her personal trips to the United States and Canada, she has spread the message of Shinichi Suzuki that children can learn to play more naturally and with better tone. Born in 1927 in Tokyo, Kataoka began her study of the piano at age 6, studying with Yoshimune Hirata until she was 16. After World War II, she continued her studies with Haruko Fujita. In 1955, she was first introduced to The Suzuki Method. She travelled to Matsumoto in 1956 to study with Dr. Suzuki, and was deeply impressed with the results he was achieving in teaching children to play the violin. Dr. Suzuki’s method not only affected her teaching, but also her own playing of the piano. Today, Haruko Kataoka participates in conferences, workshops, and summer institutes throughout the world on the Suzuki Piano School.

## *What is The Suzuki Method?*

**T**HE SUZUKI METHOD is based on *the mother tongue approach*.

All human beings on earth at birth start to learn speaking their native tongue. I am sure you understand this. Nobody has felt “This is difficult” or “I hate it” in the course of arriving at language proficiency. It seems nobody has given it up midway, either, thinking it impossible. We have lived without giving special thought to being able to speak one language as though it were a matter of fact. However, it is a wonderful fact. Consider learning another language. What hardship it involves! Therefore, being able to fluently speak the mother tongue is a wonderful ability, however much we may take it for granted. What is even more wonderful is that every human being on earth possesses this capability. Dr. Suzuki is a great man who woke to this wonderful reality.

The Suzuki Method treats all children as equals. Traditionally, when students learn something, their achievements are quickly judged. The teacher rewards the child who performs well, labelling him as “talented,” while neglecting the “less-talented” child. In other words, the result isn’t the teacher’s responsibility; it is up to the child to demonstrate talent.

However, when you think about it, this is very odd. If every child can learn to speak the native tongue, this would seem to indicate that all children have equal capabilities. Surely, if all children can learn to speak, they can learn to perform equally well in other areas, if their capabilities are properly fostered.

Some may think that the people of a country speak its language because they have inherited the ability, but the error is clear when we look at foreign children born and raised in Japan. They use correct Japanese with perfect freedom; they speak no differently than the Japanese. They can't have inherited the language as the Japanese might have. The same can be said of any country.

The method of learning, namely the method of fostering ability, is very important. If children are fostered by the same method as the one by which they learn to speak, any human ability can be developed whether in music or in academic fields. All human beings on earth are born with high potential for growth.

Dr. Suzuki realized this fact, and, since he was a violinist and educator, experimented with this method in violin teaching. Having achieved great success, he has been spreading the same approach to other areas, wishing happiness for all children on earth.

The Suzuki Method is based on Dr. Suzuki's profound love of humanity, of the personality of each individual. There are no human beings who are no good, who have limited capabilities. If there are any, it is because we have failed to foster their innate high potential. Shouldn't we think more carefully about how to foster them? Shouldn't we try fostering them by providing a similar learning environment as in the mother tongue? This should be the goal of all adults.

The Suzuki approach is not designed to foster professional musicians! Dr. Suzuki always says: "I am engaged in musical education for people other than professional musicians who occupy a tiny percentage of the world's population."

I think that at birth each human being is given a character by God or nature. I believe that this is what God has already decided, and human beings can do nothing about it. How one can make use of this gift from

God so that one can live in gratitude is the job assigned to humans. This means, in Dr. Suzuki's words, "Ability is not inborn; it is something to be fostered."

To foster during childhood diligence, patience, and ability to enjoy and delight; and moreover to foster wonderful human beings who can understand high art: This is The Suzuki Method. Naturally some will go into music, become scientists, or grow as politicians. Others will enter all kinds of other occupations. The Suzuki Method is an approach for fostering an individual so he will become a human being with fine ability.

### *My Introduction to The Suzuki Method*

I was born in Tokyo in 1927. Since my mother was very fond of music, she started me on the piano when I was 6-years old. Of course, as there was no Suzuki Method, I was taught by the traditional method. Yet, fortunately, I was often exposed to good music and art, since my mother not only collected many records but was fond of going to concerts. In addition, as I was physically weak, my mother, wishing to help me live strongly by giving me rigorous training in a single activity, encouraged me to practice the piano 365 days a year without ever skipping a day.

The years of World War II were traumatic ones for me. When the war ended, I realized that I still loved the piano. I resolved to study the instrument under my own motivation. I first thought of getting a good teacher, and tried practicing as many hours as possible.

I was lucky to have a wonderful teacher, Haruko Fujita. She taught me a great deal, not only about music and piano techniques, but in other areas. I studied many pieces including Beethoven's and Chopin's concertos, Bach, Brahms, and Debussy. I frequently performed in concerts.

I studied awfully hard, putting my heart into it. I even tried 10 consecutive hours daily. However, instead of satisfactory performance, what I clearly felt was physical fatigue. A question arose: can it be that I am not suited to play the piano? In brief, I wasn't improving at all.

As I listened to great performers' recordings, I could hardly think that they agonized over their performances as I did. Instead, they sounded as if they were playing with great ease and enjoyment. Can something be wrong? After all I was not born gifted. I was no good! But why? I thought, don't I love music? Am I not crazy about the piano? I was about to fall into the abyss of disillusion. Then I heard Dr. Suzuki's lecture: "Talent is not inborn; everything depends on how it is fostered." Later I also read his books.

I felt as if I was awakened, and, wishing to study with Dr. Suzuki, I moved from Tokyo to Matsumoto. When I went to Matsumoto, Dr. Suzuki was convalescing for a year, unable to go out at all. Since I had already been teaching in Tokyo, Dr. Suzuki asked me to teach in Matsumoto. Matsumoto was still the country at that time. Few families owned pianos, and there were hardly any students.

My task was to accompany Dr. Suzuki's students while observing the lessons of the Suzuki class. In those days, he taught 12 or 13 junior and senior high school students, who later became outstanding performers or educators, as well as teacher trainee group lessons. This was a pleasant way to spend my days learning about The Suzuki Method.

Dr. Suzuki's younger sister Hina Aikawa was still alive then and cared for me. I visited the Suzukis nearly every day to be treated to food and to listen to Dr. Suzuki talk. Since this was my first encounter with him, I did not necessarily understand everything that was said; on looking back, however, I realize with fresh gratitude how many precious things he gave me during these first years to help me understand The Suzuki Method. I

would like to share with others the happiness that I was given.

*My Motivations for Writing this Booklet*

For a long time I knew nothing about the world of music. Aside from the performances of the world's greatest artists and maestros with whom I was familiar through records and concerts, I only knew myself and my students.

In the past few years, I have had a number of occasions to visit other countries for the purpose of spreading The Suzuki Method, and to make contact with many teachers. I was a little surprised. I sensed that a greater number of people than I had thought may be suffering due to the traditional method of teaching music. I started to write this booklet, thinking that perhaps by writing, however clumsily, about my experiences, I could be of help to those unaware of this new method.

It is already 10 years since the Suzuki Piano School was started in the United States and Canada. Everyone understands that this is an educational approach which fosters children not through printed music but through listening. Children who were 5 or 6 when the method started are growing as wonderful, fine human beings.

However, coming into contact with teachers at workshops in various places, I am surprised by the many children who play with fingers curved too much while moving the wrists too much. Should we not play moving the hands more naturally? I would like them to play with greater attention to the tone rather than to the elbow, wrist, and hand shapes.

Dr. Suzuki is constantly studying tone in a thorough-going way. The quest springs from his deep love, which prompts him to ask how children can enjoy playing in the most relaxed way. Energy used differs completely between one who plays naturally and one who plays unnaturally with bad habits. In The Suzuki Method, children study tone and learn how to play with ease.

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## THE SUZUKI METHOD

**T**HE SUZUKI METHOD is completely different from the traditional approach. Traditionally, elementary music texts are prepared on the basis of how adults think children learn. Beginner books first teach printed music. As for playing, they let the student start with whole notes which, adults believe, are theoretically the easiest to play.

Think how babies learn language. The first word or two may be simple. But after that they do not choose only to learn easy things. There is some reason in the logical theory that children learn things in order, starting with easier things and gradually learning harder things. However, human children are far more wonderful: Not being hindered by such logic, they simply absorb everything that is in their environment. Hence, it is most important to let children listen to music, that is, to create a good environment.

In The Suzuki Method, rather than first playing the piano, the important job is to listen to the music the child is trying to learn. Since starting The Suzuki Method in postwar Japan, Dr. Suzuki has demonstrated that "listening is essential." A good many people in different fields have understood this and are practicing it successfully. When one listens repeatedly, the music enters the mind; and the more thoroughly it is internalized, the easier it is to reproduce.

I, too, did not understand this well, but through experimenting with my own students, I can now confidently confirm that it is much easier and pleasanter to study when one listens than when one plays without listening. Take a look at how English is studied in Japanese schools. It is taught by reading printed texts and studying grammar, and is unsuccessful despite the



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# BOOK 1

## *The First Lesson*

**I**N THE SUZUKI METHOD, the teacher does not teach an individual student alone as in the traditional method. A group of students comes to lessons in the same time slot, and, instead of each leaving right away after his own lesson, everybody stays to listen to each other.

That is because it is often easier to recognize other people's mistakes than our own. Parents often understand instructions better when another's child is receiving them, than when their own children are being corrected. Children, too, can learn while enjoying each other. Therefore, when a new student-parent couple comes to study by The Suzuki Method, we clearly explain our approach, and tell the parent that, above everything else, it is of prime importance to listen to music.

If, as in my case, a classroom already exists, we ask them to come to observe lessons of Book 1 students. They observe at least two or three weekly lessons (in some cases over a period of 1 to 3 months) before actually starting. If you are starting a new class, it is recommended that you wait until you have two or three students and then start them together as a group.

Now, my first lesson consists of asking the student to stand before me face to face. I then ask him to follow my instruction: "Stand with your feet together"; "Put your hands neatly at your side"; etc. For a 3-year old, standing with his feet together is a fairly difficult job. If the child fails to do this, I ask his parents to have him practice it patiently at home, several times daily.