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## **Mary Craig Powell**

Mary Craig Powell received her baccalaureate degree *Magna Cum Laude* from East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina. Her Master of Music in Piano Performance is from Wichita State University in Kansas.

She has taught at colleges in North and South Carolina and Illinois, and currently offers Suzuki teacher training and student lessons at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio. Interest in Suzuki piano pedagogy began while her sons were studying Suzuki violin in the early 1970s. Already known as a fine teacher, her reputation grew to international proportions when she based her instruction on the Suzuki philosophy. Her young students are consistent winners in auditions and competitions. She communicates her high standards and common sense approach to teachers and students' parents with lectures and demonstrations at workshops and conferences throughout the world.

She has further served the Suzuki movement through elective offices in the Suzuki Association of the Americas and the Suzuki Association of Ohio.

### **Dedication**

To my wonderful sons, John and Robert,  
with whom my love of the Suzuki method began.

## Preface

During the past few years it has been exciting to watch the area of Suzuki piano develop. Through workshops, institutes, and teacher development courses, parents and teachers have been able to grow and improve their skills in an unprecedented way. I have seen their craving for more information and techniques, and it is my hope that *Focus on Suzuki Piano* will be a contribution in those areas and the growth of the remarkable Suzuki movement.

This book is the result of an effort to record and preserve many of the ideas and techniques I have used over a period of years as I adapted my teaching to the Suzuki philosophy. It has been compiled from articles that first appeared in *Suzuki World* magazine between 1982 and 1987. Although a connecting philosophy weaves its way throughout the book, each chapter is complete in itself. Thus, it may be read in whatever order the reader wishes. By no means does it represent an examination of all aspects of Suzuki piano, nor is it all I have to offer on the subject. I have more to write.

Mary Craig Powell

## Clarification

Because the English language lacks a singular pronoun which can refer to either “he” or “she,” for the sake of clarity or consistency we have used “he” to mean the student and “she,” the teacher throughout the book. In a few instances when the author is referring to a particular female student, “she” is used to refer to the student, but in these rare instances, it is obvious that the reference is to the student, not the teacher.

Although the Suzuki “parent” does not need to be the mother, “mother” is used to refer to that adult who accompanies the child to the lesson and is responsible for the supervision of the listening and practice at home.

## Acknowledgments

It all began with a phone call. Lorraine and Reginald Fink were asking me to become piano editor of their newly-formed magazine, *Suzuki World*. It was too exciting and challenging to give anything but a sound “yes” response.

I wondered if I could find ample topics on which to write in the beginning. However, as the articles evolved I discovered that I possessed a wealth of information. I realize that countless individuals along the way have made their contributions through their knowledge, guidance, love, and support. They must be acknowledged.

My first appreciation and tribute goes to Shinichi Suzuki for the beautiful gift he has given to the world, the Suzuki method. Without it, none of the rest would have been possible.

There are those from whom I gained my initial training to thank. They planted the seeds in me that grew and developed into flowers I had never before dreamed possible.

First is Lorraine Fink, my sons’ violin teacher, who gave me my first knowledge. Through absorbing her teaching as a parent during years of lessons, her tremendous insights into the philosophy made a significant impact on me and deepened my understanding. For this reason, I consider her my greatest trainer.

Next came training with piano specialists of the method — Haruko Kataoka, Carole Bigler, and Valery Lloyd-Watts. Through them I learned the application of the philosophy to the piano. My teacher trainees, colleagues, and friends have been highly supportive and encouraging over the years. In particular I wish to thank my friends Ginny and Larry Christopherson, and Reginald Fink, my friend and publisher.

Last, I must include Mae, my very special aunt, for first instilling in me a love of music. I still remember the hot but wonderful summer nights when I was a tiny child that she sang me to sleep as we swung on the front porch of our North California home. Her love and support of my music over the years has meant a great deal.

To all the above as well as many unnamed, I extend my grateful appreciation. They are all an integral and important part of my results.

Mary Craig Powell

# Chapter 1

## Focus on Philosophy

“If love is deep, much can be accomplished.” These words from Shinichi Suzuki, founder of the Suzuki method, provide powerful insight into the man, the philosophy, and the method.

The Suzuki method began with Dr. Suzuki’s realization that a child displays phenomenal abilities when he learns to speak his native language (mother tongue) during his early years of life. Learning to speak a new language is difficult for an older student to accomplish, but every young child does this—and long before he learns to read. Suzuki felt that we must learn how to develop the amazing potential that every child possesses; furthermore, we must acknowledge the fact that ability, not only in music but in other fields as well, is not inherited. Man is born without talent and his environment controls what he becomes. Others had realized this before. Suzuki’s genius lay in his ability to develop an educational method which grows logically from its underlying philosophy.

A summary of Suzuki’s philosophy is as follows:

The Suzuki philosophy embraces the belief that all children have great potential and that their abilities can be developed best by making use of that learning process which is universally most natural to all children—the Mother Tongue approach. Therefore, the Suzuki method of musical instruction parallels virtually without modification the same course that the child experiences from infancy in the learning of his language skills.

Since Dr. Suzuki is a violinist, he applied the method first to the violin. We who teach Suzuki piano are grateful for the outstanding contributions of Mrs. Haruko Kataoka and Mrs. Shizuko Suzuki who worked with Dr. Suzuki in order to adapt the method to the study of piano.

The Suzuki method, also called Talent Education, is based upon certain fundamental ideas that must be mentioned in order to gain a comprehensive picture of it. They are as follows:

**1. Early Beginning.** It is believed that the ability of a child to learn by aural means is strongest from birth to age seven. Thus, a method which relies heavily on aural capability is best begun early in order to use it to its greatest advantage. It should be mentioned, however, that numerous children over seven have begun and successfully enjoyed the method also.

# Chapter 5

## Focus on Psychology

### Points on Psychology for the Suzuki Teacher

Our Suzuki philosophy endorses a positive and non-judgmental psychology. Much is written, said, and stressed about it.

If I could return to school and select a second discipline to facilitate my teaching, it would be the field of child psychology. For years I have read books on the subject in order to enrich my approach toward my students. I do not pretend to be a psychologist in writing this article. However, I would like to share with you some of the things I have learned that have greatly improved working relationships with my students.

#### Give Choices Within Boundaries

Children need and like to be able to make choices. These are possible to give in lessons, provided we set the boundaries. A question given without boundaries can potentially bring difficult responses. For example, “What would you like to do next?” might evoke a response such as, “I would like to climb on your piano.”

The same question with boundaries established such as, “What would you like to play next, *Lightly Row* or *Go Tell Aunt Rhody*?” is excellent. In this way, the child has had limitations set but feels a degree of flexibility within them. Children feel more secure within boundaries in all areas of their lives.

#### Praise and Criticize the Act

In Haim Ginott’s book *Between Parent and Child*, he discusses the fact that praise and criticism must deal only with the child’s efforts and accomplishments and not with his character and personality.

For example, when a child has played a piece beautifully, helpful praise from the teacher should be “Your performance was beautiful” (praise of the act) rather than “You are wonderful” (praise of the child). He explains that praise of the child’s character and personality can make him feel guilty; he may have many thoughts about himself that cause him to feel far less than wonderful. Thus, our unhelpful praise can potentially impose guilt upon him.

The same is true of criticism. For a teacher or mother to tell a child “You are