

## OUR MOVEMENT AND OUR HOPE

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*An introductory speech delivered at the 1958 Tokyo Suzuki Festival*  
By SHINICHI SUZUKI

All human beings are born with great potentialities, and each individual has within himself the capacity for developing to a very high level.

Although some individuals display a remarkable ability during their lifetime, we are not primarily concerned here with these extraordinary cases. However, there are many others, born with a high potential, who fail in some way, through unfavorable conditions, to develop their original power, so that their lives end at a comparatively low level.

Education begins from the day of birth. We must recognize the amazing power of the infant who absorbs everything in his surroundings and adds to his knowledge. If attention is not given to early infancy, how can the child's original power be developed. We learn from nature that a plant which is damaged or stunted during the sapling stage does not have a promising future. Yet at present, we know very little about proper training for the early infancy of human beings. Therefore, we must learn more about the conditions in which early human growth takes place.

Though still in an experimental stage, Talent Education has realized that all children in the world show their splendid capacities by speaking and understanding their mother language, thus displaying the original power of the human mind. *Is it not probable that this mother language method holds the key to human development?*

Talent Education has applied this method to the teaching of music: children, taken without previous aptitude or intelligence tests of any kind, have almost without exception made great progress.

Cultural sensitivity is not inherited, but is developed after birth. The hereditary ability of the mind is measured by the speed with which it adapts to circumstances. It is wrong to assume that special talent for learning music, literature, or any other field, is primarily inherited.

This is not to say that everyone can reach the same level of achievement. However, each individual can certainly achieve the equivalent of his language proficiency in other fields. We must investigate methods through which all children can develop their various talents. In a way this may be more important than the investigation of atomic power. After twelve years, Talent Education now demonstrates the harvest of its educational experiment in music, and after observing and hearing the performances of these children, we adults should reflect, and consider whether this method is not the best way to develop all human talents.

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## Foreword—and a Little History

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This description of the Suzuki Approach and its practical application was originally written in 1971, at the request of Lester Salomon, editor of *Allegro*, the monthly newspaper of the New York Musicians' Union (Local 802, A.F. of M.). *Allegro* published it as a ten-part series, running from the issue of November 1971 through that of August 1972.

Although the Suzuki ideas were indeed first introduced in the United States, to a small group of string teachers at Oberlin, in 1958, it was not until 1964, when Suzuki brought his first tour group to this country, that interest in these ideas spread nation-wide.

The next six years saw an explosion of Suzuki programs around the country, and, by 1970, it became apparent that the Suzuki movement had reached a turning point. That was the year that saw the first American Summer Suzuki Institute at Stephens Point, Wisconsin; the founding of the Suzuki Association of the Americas; and, incidentally, the founding of my own School for Strings in New York City, a school which started originally as a small, experimental apprenticeship program for training Suzuki teachers.

Teacher training was very much on the minds of those of us who attended those first meetings of the Suzuki Association of the Americas. It was already evident to us then, over 25 years ago, that we were heading for a major shortage of good, well-trained Suzuki teachers. In fact, already in 1970, good teachers were in short supply. At the same time, we were already aware that, despite the obvious success and increasing popularity of the Suzuki approach, the professional performers and the conservatory and college teachers had remained surprisingly uninformed and uninterested in the possibilities of what many of them still considered to be a very controversial approach to teaching an instrument.

Thus, the specific reason for the publication of this long series of articles in *Allegro* was, we hoped, to clear up many widely held misconceptions, and to encourage more fine players and teachers to explore the Suzuki ideas. Through this publication, we hoped to help alleviate the shortage of teachers and, at the same time, to improve the overall quality of teaching.

Twenty-six years later, in 1997, we are still suffering from a teacher shortage, and we are still concerned with improving the over-all quality of teaching! Therefore, it seems appropriate to re-publish these articles in book form, making them more widely available.

## **A Note on the Format...**

Since it seemed historically interesting to see where we were in 1971, I decided to change very little of the original text, inserting appropriate 1996-1997 updates in brackets.

And since Suzuki himself was a violinist (as am I), and the Suzuki movement started with the violin, I have retained my original descriptions of violin instruction. The same basic techniques and approach apply to the instruments subsequently added to the Suzuki movement.

To take care of certain areas where there have been major developments, I have added a closing section: “Afterword — 1996-1997.”

## **...and a Note of Thanks**

The original manuscript could never have been written without the help of Sheila Keats who, acting as my editor, really became my collaborator. Sheila, who served as my Associate Director at The School for Strings for almost 25 years, has continued to be my invaluable editor and collaborator in this 1996-1997 version.

## Introduction

### The Suzuki Philosophy

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It was in 1958 that American string teachers first encountered the work of Shinichi Suzuki. That year, at a regional meeting of string specialists held at Oberlin College, a Japanese film of 750 children playing the Bach Double Concerto was shown. The film, made at the 1957 Talent Education Graduation Concert in Tokyo, made an overwhelming impact on its American audience.

Since that time, Suzuki programs have been instituted all over this country: in schools, by private teachers, as community efforts with parent sponsorship. More and more parents have become interested in Suzuki's ideas, and have been caught up with enthusiasm by his success in training very young children to play the violin [and, in later developments, the 'cello, the viola, the piano, the harp, the guitar, the double bass, the flute, and the recorder]. Wherever Suzuki programs have been established, teachers have found themselves swamped with students.

It is not only the parents who want violin lessons for their children. The children themselves, seeing their small contemporaries playing the violin, and finding great pleasure in doing so, have begun clamoring for violin lessons.

What is this Suzuki approach, and what is there about it that has so appealed to parents and children alike? Very simply, Suzuki's approach is one that teaches the violin successfully to very small children, some as young as two-and-a-half or three.

What makes Suzuki's approach unique is that never before has there been a way to teach a stringed instrument — or, for that matter, any instrument — so successfully to such young children, and to so many children. For what Suzuki has developed is a way of teaching *any* child to play the violin, and to play it well. Average children, not prodigies! As he says: "All children can be educated."



The idea that a three-year-old can learn to play a musical instrument is, of course, not a new one. What *is* new is the idea that *any* three-year-old can be taught to play it well, even though he does not seem to have a special outstanding talent for music. Judging by the numbers of Suzuki-trained children in both Japan and the United States who are playing, and playing well, Suzuki would seem to have proved the validity of his idea.

## Chapter 1

# The Teaching Process

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How does Suzuki, and how do Suzuki-oriented teachers achieve their results? Just how *do* you teach a three-year-old? According to Suzuki, you teach him music, and you teach him the violin, just as he was taught to speak his native language.

Suzuki contends that, since all children of normal intelligence learn to speak a language by imitating what they hear around them, so can they learn the language of music in the same fashion. His approach to teaching music might be termed a linguistic one, or, as he puts it, a “Mother Tongue” approach.

This Mother-Tongue approach is, however, not first introduced to the child as late as the age of three. Rather, according to Suzuki, the teaching of the three-year-old actually starts the day he is born. Suzuki requires from the very beginning a consistent program of listening. Just as the child who eventually will learn to speak is constantly surrounded by the sounds of spoken language, so should the child who eventually will learn to play be surrounded by the sounds of fine music. To quote his own words, Suzuki instructs the parents:

Select one piece of great music for a newborn baby. Train the baby by letting him listen every day to a record or a tape recording of the same piece of music. The baby should listen to only one piece of music repeatedly. If this is done, it will be found that any baby, after five or six months, will have clearly memorized the piece of music.

At this point, the parent will begin adding other works, one at a time, to the baby’s listening program, increasing the child’s listening repertoire gradually until, by the time he is two-and-a-half or three, he is thoroughly familiar with a number of works in a wide range of styles, all of which, through constant exposure and attendant familiarity, he recognizes and enjoys.

Suzuki’s success, then, rests first on this early exposure, this early creation of a musical environment for the child. As a matter of fact, Suzuki is a strong believer in the power of environment, feeling that, regardless of a child’s heredity, it is the environment which ultimately will determine the nature and extent of his future accomplishments.

Suzuki’s Mother-Tongue approach, by creating a musical environment for the child from birth, and by introducing specific instruction at the age of two-and-a-half or three, takes advantage of a child’s best language-learning years—from about two to seven—to teach the child the language of music. Thus the emphasis on the early start.



The full account of how Suzuki arrived at his Mother-Tongue approach, and how he first experimented with the application of it, is told in his book, *Nurtured by Love*. In this book, Suzuki outlines the history of his Talent Education Movement, and recounts, through

## Chapter 3

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# The Suzuki Musical Materials and Their Use

One of the greatest challenges in teaching, of course, is the choice of materials. The materials we use should create a sequence through which the student's abilities are developed systematically, and they should provide inspiration. We all learn best what we *want* to learn, not simply what we are *made* to learn.

Suzuki's *Violin School* meets this challenge brilliantly. As a basic premise, he has clearly in mind what he wants to teach and how he wants to teach it. Each piece in the ten-volume compilation was chosen for a specific technical and musical reason. It was then thoroughly tested for both results and student appeal. A piece was added to the method only after all these requirements were met. (In a few instances, when he could not find a piece to serve his purpose, Suzuki wrote one himself. These original pieces are all in folk character, and children seem to like them as well as they do the real folk material that makes up a good part of the first book.) With this testing process, it took Suzuki ten years to compile his method, and it is still undergoing revision. [Interestingly enough, today, in 1997, there is a committee charged with again reviewing and updating the violin materials. Similarly, both the 'cello and the piano materials have been revised and updated.]

Just as Suzuki, with characteristic patience and tenacity, searched widely and tested thoroughly for the specific pieces he felt would be most effective for inclusion in his *Violin School*, so did he search and test for the most effective ways of teaching mastery of the instrument.

An illustration of this is the account of his search for the production of a beautiful tone. To Suzuki, the Kreisler tone represents the ideal of a beautiful violin sound. To discover Kreisler's method of tone production, Suzuki taped one phrase from Kreisler's recording of the Grieg C-Minor Sonata, a recording Kreisler made with Rachmaninoff. Then Suzuki taped himself playing the same phrase, and compared the two tapes. Needless to say, they were quite far apart in quality! So, he started experimenting. After each slight change in his own tone production, he taped the result and checked again. Working this way, he finally achieved a tape that was identical in sound with the Kreisler tape, and he knew exactly how he had achieved the final result. This experiment, with a single phrase, took him only forty (!) hours. One might question the matching of taped tone, but this *does* illustrate Suzuki's persistence and purpose.



Tone as a result of bow control, and an understanding of how the bow hair sets the string into vibration, is an obsession with Suzuki. (Note: There is an entire book, *Ton-Übung*, or *Tone Studies*, in the list of materials.) As for vibrato as an important facet of tone color, Suzuki claims to be still in the exploratory and experimental stage. His own vibrato is