

# AMBASSADOR

## Aber Suzuki Center

University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point  
College of Fine Arts and Communication

*Changing lives by providing the best in performance,  
creativity, and expression*

December 2005

### From the Director's Desk

By Dee Martz

*Reprinted with permission from the February, 1992 Wheaton College Suzuki Program newsletter.*

Excellence  
By Sarah Williams

Excellence in the workplace, with our children, at home and in education. These are all topics of vital interest to each of us. Many of us seek it knowing little of what we are looking for. In our eagerness, we sometimes chart our course for excellence before we've clearly defined "excellence" as a word, or the impact that, once defined, it might have on our lives. In particular how do we want excellence to come together as a life applying experience for our children?

Is excellence the quest of being the best in any endeavor and/or achieving the highest academic scores? Is it perfection or being the winner? To some, the answer is clearly "yes". This definition of excellence can leave children and parents alike frustrated, unfulfilled and unable to develop their natural abilities because excellence has become competitive in nature.

In December of 1990, Dr. Best (Dean of Wheaton College's Conservatory of Music) addressed the student body at chapel talking about this same subject. He pointed out a different definition of excellence. "Excellence is the process of becoming better than I once was. Not better than someone else is, or even like someone else. Excellence is ... a process of improving over yesterday... It is set in the context of growth, of growing up into, or striving, wrestling, hungering, thirsting, pressing on from point to point and achievement to achievement. Excellence is not a steady state; it is sojourn, and progress, reformation and change. We are unequally gifted – no two people are alike; hence we cannot equally achieve. But this is not the point. Whatever we are, whoever we are, we can all be better than we once were".

This approach to excellence creates fertile ground where the seeds of positive attitude can germinate into steady progress and development of self esteem. These tools are the essence of happiness, the building of character and the real skills for youth to be successful.

Let us then help our children appreciate their gifts and successes as well as those of other children around them, constantly reminding

and teaching ourselves and our children the rewards of striving each day to be a little better in all facets of life. This is the lifetime road in pursuit of excellence.



### Buying an Instrument

By Lawrence Leviton

One of the most exciting events in the life of a young string player is when they bring home their first full size instrument from the violin shop. Even though this is a long anticipated event, the process of choosing an instrument is often a daunting experience for parents. There are many questions that face the prospective buyer of a new string instrument: How much money do I have to spend? Where do I go to make the purchase? What are the qualities of a good instrument? In this article, I will offer some practical advice on buying an instrument and help you sort through some of the issues you will encounter when buying your new instrument.

#### HOW MUCH DO I NEED TO SPEND?

Instruments can range in price from a few hundred dollars for a factory made plywood instrument to upwards of \$100,000 dollars for an old Italian instrument. You should expect to spend between \$2,000.00 and \$10,000.00 for a good quality student instrument, case and bow. Some mail order companies offer student packages that can be acquired for \$1,500.00 to \$2,500.00. At the next level up, one can begin to find higher quality hand-made instruments. Your teacher can be a helpful guide in helping you to determine the price range of an instrument that will be a good match for your child.

#### WHERE TO BUY YOUR INSTRUMENT

There are many choices available to prospective buyers of instruments. There are general music stores, which sell not only string instruments, but pianos, band instruments, and other music merchandise. Occasionally, you may find a good instrument in one of these stores, but unless there is a full time trained string instrument specialist on hand, the chances of getting a quality instrument are remote. I recommend to my students that they purchase their instruments at a shop that deals exclusively in string instrument sales and repair. These shops usually have a trained violin maker present, who can properly set up the instrument for optimal playability. They sell instruments that are either made on the premises or are selected by the owners for their quality and consistent craftsmanship.

Although many of these shops are several hundred miles from Stevens Point, it is worth it, in the long run to make the trip. Your teacher will be able to provide you with some advice on which shop might best suit your needs.

One final option is mail order. There are several large mail order shops such as Shar Products and Southwest Strings, that have expanded their services to include full time string instrument specialists. Their inventory now includes a selection of instruments that ranges from student models to professional quality. These companies ship instruments out for tryout. Often the customer pays some or all of the shipping costs of this trial. The disadvantage here is the inability to try out several instruments at once and compare four or five instruments at a single sitting. Your teacher can be a good resource in directing you to a good mail order company.

#### WHAT TO LOOK FOR

As I mentioned earlier, there is a wide range of instruments and prices to choose from. I encourage my students to look for a hand made instrument that is made of high quality materials. Cheaper instruments are made out of composite materials, such as plywood, which do not provide the resonance and tone quality of solid wood instruments. High quality instruments generally use maple and spruce for construction and produce a richer and more refined sound than composite instruments.

The higher end instruments are often made by a skilled violin maker who builds the entire instrument from scratch. Lower to mid-range instruments are often made in a shop, where individual parts are made by several people, with the final construction overseen by the shop foreman or owner, who puts his or her label in the instrument. These shop-made instruments are often excellent choices for a young student.

#### WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE SHOP

A reputable violin shop or mail order company will let you take one or more instruments home for a trial that generally lasts a week or so. I strongly encourage my students to follow this procedure. This will allow your teacher to examine the instrument for tone quality and workmanship and help you determine if it is a good value. Also, your teacher is the best qualified person to match your child with an instrument that is appropriate to his or her ability level. These shops should have a good selection of instruments on hand, at a variety of prices. This facilitates making the best selection for your child.

A good shop will also allow for trade-ins at a later time. When a student has gotten to a point in their development where an instrument is not meeting their musical needs, they can return to the place that they purchased the instrument and receive full value in trade towards a higher quality instrument. Always ask about policies regarding trade-ins and how the shop deals with problems that might crop up later. Although you probably won't get a written warranty, a good shop will generally make a commitment to repair defective products and have some kind of maintenance program in place.

#### TRYING OUT THE INSTRUMENT

During the trial period look for the following characteristics:

1) Does it feel good to play? Is it comfortable to play in different positions? Is the neck the right size for your child? Is it easy to get around the instrument?

2) Play some notes in the lowest range and then the highest range. Does it have an even sound in all registers of the instrument?

3) Do you like the sound? Does it grab you immediately? Sometimes an instrument's quality will only gradually emerge; it sometimes takes several days and several tryouts to begin to appreciate the qualities of an instrument. Have your teacher play the instrument for you in an acoustically rich environment. How does it sound in different spaces?

#### MAKING THE DECISION

Sometimes this is the easy part; student, parent, and teacher find an instrument in the right price range that has an attractive appearance and sound. They immediately know that this is the right choice. Often, the decision is not that easy. I recommend to my students that they not be in a hurry.

Take the time to find the right instrument for your child or yourself. Sometimes, this process can take up to several months. It is easy to be impressed with a pretty varnish or fancy case that is thrown in. Remember that an instrument is a long term investment in your child's musical development. It is important to make a careful and well thought out decision. This might necessitate making trips to several shops over a few weeks to get the most comprehensive picture of what is available.

#### CONCLUSIONS

I have touched upon a few of the things that are important to consider when purchasing your new instrument. Here is a summary of the steps involved in this process:

- 1) Determine your price range.
- 2) Use your teacher as a resource person.
- 3) Find the appropriate shop to make your purchase.
- 4) Take your time-the right instrument is out there. Use a systematic and patient approach to help you make a good choice.

With careful planning and research, the process can be exciting and contribute to the long term musical development of students and enhance their joy of music making.

Here are a few resources that will give you a start in your search:

1) Shar Products	Phone number	1-800248-Shar
2) Ralph Rabin	Phone number	1-608-274-8272
3) Claire Givens Violins	Phone number	1-800-279-4323
4) Larry Frye-Green Bay	Phone number	1-920-433-0722
5) Potter Violins	Phone number	1-800-317-9452
6) Michael Becker	Phone number	1-847-823-5491
7) Southwest Strings	Phone number	1-800-528-3430
8) Heid Music	Phone number	1-920-734-1969



## Notes From the Endpin

By Lawrence Leviton

Cello Day 2005 was a great success. Over 60 cellists from throughout Wisconsin came to UW-Stevens Point on November 6<sup>th</sup> for a day of cello ensemble playing, workshops, and the opportunity to make new cello friends. There was a panel discussion on preparing solos for auditions, tours of the new Noel Fine Arts Center, and, in what several participants said was their favorite activity, a lively hour that showcased the role of the cello in movies.

In addition, UW-SP and the Wisconsin Cello Society hosted the first ever Wisconsin Cello Society Cello competition, with winners and prizes given out in several categories. Over 12 students participated in the competitions and the level of artistry that they demonstrated was quite remarkable.

Many cellists from our local program participated and I want to thank all of them and their parents who made Cello Day 2005 such a success.



## Voila Viola

By Dee Martz

Do you know about the Easy Button? Check out the Staples ads. The one they sell says "That was easy" and according to their PR department would make a great stocking stuffer. There are some days when I could really use the magic of the Easy Button.

In *Helping Parents Practice*, American Suzuki Institute clinician Ed Sprunger helps us find our own Easy Button. This book is divided into sections which he calls *practice basics*. My current favorite is "Keep the focus on making things easier." In this chapter Mr. Sprunger reminds parents (and teachers!) that the purpose of practice is to make things easy. It is such a simple concept, yet so true. Thinking about practice this way helps keep the focus on the kind of success that is dependable and that easily transfers from one situation to another.

For example, the purpose of practicing ringing tones, is not just to find the ringing tones, it is to find them systematically and with so many successful repetitions, that playing ringing tones happens all the time. The purpose of practicing "bent thumb, curved pinky" is not so that Mom can take a wonderful photo of your bow hand to send to Grandma, but rather to make the correct shape of the bow hand so easy that it happens even when practicing something else.

The goal is always the same whether practicing a beginning skill such as rest position feet, or more advance skills such as vibrato, making a beautiful phrase or expressive intonation. Yes, first one must learn to do the skill correctly but that is just the beginning. The real purpose of practice is to learn how to make playing so easy that it can be fluid, expressive and fun. Then it is time to push on the big red button to hear it proclaim "That was easy."

## Parent Education Sessions

The following Parent Education sessions will be held, 7:30 pm in NFAC 361. All Suzuki parents/guardians are welcome.

December 13 – "Practicing: The Great Quest for Consistency without Boredom"

February 14 – "Note Reading 101: A Survival Manual for Parents"

April 11 – "The Art of Reviewing With a Purpose"



## Faculty News

**Ann Marie Novak** performed as part of a trio in Marshfield on November 9 for the presentation of the Sebold Award in medical research. She also performed as a collaborative pianist for the Cello Day festivities at UWSP.

**Pat D'Ercole** was a clinician for the Okemos Suzuki Workshop, November 4- 5 in Okemos, MI.

In November, **Lawrence Leviton** performed in a piano trio recital with fellow UWSP faculty Molly Roseman in performances at the Wausau Conservatory and at UW-Stevens Point.



## Student News

**Gretchen Sands** played in the pit orchestra of the Waupaca High School production of *Guys and Dolls* in November. Gretchen was the only string player in the orchestra because the school does not have it's own orchestra.

**Jason Smith** is a member of the Community Children Choir and performed with the CWSO at their Holiday Concert on December 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>.

**Tom Felt**, 5 year's old, has practiced 400 days in a row! **Craig Felt**, 9 year's old, has practiced 483 days in a row! Congratulations to Tom and Craig and their mom, Elizabeth.

**Emily Spaid** with **Maria, Teresita and Christina Marchel** provided violin music for the Chamber of Commerce Council members at the Portage County Business After 5 Social Gathering at the Harmony Living Center on Nov. 14, 2005. They will also perform at the CenterPoint Mall on Fri., Dec. 9 from 7- 8:00 pm.

### November 2005 Graduates

James Banovetz, Piano Book 3  
Anna Czernicki, Piano Book 3  
Dawn Passineau, Piano Book 4  
Marcus Morris, Violin Book 2  
Lindsey Mocadlo, Violin Book 5  
Jonathan Cochrane, Violin Book 3  
Lauren Lila, Violin Twinkle  
Emily Spaid, Violin Book 7  
Sarah Harmon, Violin Twinkle  
Michael Josephson, Violin Book 6  
Christian Czernicki, Violin Book 10



### Upcoming Events

Saturday, December 10<sup>th</sup>, Marathon Saturday

Sunday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, Solo Recitals, 2:00 and 3:30 pm, NFAC Room 221

Saturday, January 21<sup>st</sup>, Marathon Saturday

Sunday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, Solo Recitals, 2:00 and 3:30 pm, Michelsen Hall

January 27-28, 2006, Chamber Music Weekend

Saturday, January 28<sup>th</sup>, Chamber Music Concert, 3:30 pm, NFAC Room 221

Saturday, February 4<sup>th</sup>, Marathon Saturday

Sunday, February 5<sup>th</sup>, Solo Recitals, 2:00 and 3:30 pm, Michelsen Hall

Saturday, March 11<sup>th</sup>, Marathon Saturday

Sunday, March 12<sup>th</sup>, Solo Recitals, 2:00 and 3:30 pm, UC Alumni Room

Happy Holidays,  
from all of us to all of you!

