

# THE SUZUKI METHOD

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The Suzuki Method, or *Talent Education*, was formulated by Shinichi Suzuki, son of the first Japanese violin-maker. Born in 1898, Suzuki studied the violin for some years before deciding to go to Berlin in the 1920's for further preparation. While struggling to learn the German language, Suzuki had the first ideas that led to the development of his *mother tongue* theory.



Suzuki noted that children all over the world learn to speak their mother tongue with ease, no matter how complicated it might be. They learn to speak by listening, primarily to their parents and caregivers, and then imitating. If a child's efforts to speak and increase vocabulary meet with praise and positive reinforcement, the learning process is facilitated. Thus, very young children acquire huge vocabularies seemingly without effort.

Suzuki felt that the same steps involved in language learning:

- Daily listening followed by imitation;
- Constant repetition; and
- Praise and encouragement;

carried out in positive learning environments (home and studio), could be applied to the learning of music. Suzuki children learn in an atmosphere of encouragement and stimulation--created by the Suzuki teacher--and fostered at home by the Suzuki parent. As the beginning Suzuki student is usually very young--as young as 3 years old--these elements are crucial to the success of the Method.

Suzuki students develop their music ear before they are introduced to notes on a staff ("rote before note"). Just as young children are not expected to be able to read their language before they speak it, Suzuki children are not asked to read music before they have already listened to and can accurately play a fairly extensive repertoire of pieces. When the child, playing on a scaled-to-size instrument, can play a number of pieces with beautiful tone and proper positioning, the Suzuki teacher introduces note reading.

Younger Suzuki students observe older, more experienced students at frequent, regular studio and public recitals as they play the advanced level repertoire. One is naturally motivated to become more independent through acquiring music reading skill in order to be able to tackle these exciting sonatas and concertos! The constant playing in recitals, right from the beginning of study, has the additional benefit of providing opportunities to gain poise and confidence in supportive performance situations.

The Suzuki repertoire consists of a selection and sequence of musical material appropriate to each instrument (violin, viola, cello, piano, flute, and harp, in addition to pilot programs in bass and guitar) from the standpoints of motor skills and emotional readiness. Beginning students are accompanied by a parent/caregiver who will function as teacher between lessons, as they start their study. Formal instruction usually means one weekly lesson supplemented by a weekly or monthly group class and/or informal recital.

Suzuki teachers utilize creative and imaginative strategies in their teaching methods. They incorporate musical games, hold recitals for groups of stuffed animals, teach rhythm and movement classes and use many other venues to help their students and parents enjoy musical study. Children who enjoy their musical study will have greater motivation to practice and gain increasing mastery.

All Suzuki students follow the same sequence and choice of musical materials for their particular instrument. Each Suzuki School instrument has its own repertoire. Beginning with Volume I, the child masters each new composition, moving carefully forward, acquiring new skills with each piece which prepares the student for the ones to follow. All pieces learned are kept in repertory and continually played. Teen-aged Suzuki students still play the anthem of the Suzuki Method *Twinkle Variations* (usually the first piece they learned!)

While the main purpose of Suzuki study is to provide a happy way to foster development of the "total" child--and not to produce child musical "prodigies" or future concert artists--many Suzuki-trained students do go on to serious music study and professional careers. Others, according to at least one fairly recent survey taken in upstate New York, grow up loving fine music and participating in community and other amateur orchestras when they have time off from their offices, classrooms hospital wards, homes, or to their job sites.

While there is no documented evidence of a Suzuki "type" person, certainly a child who has grown up surrounded by love and some of the world's most beautiful music would stand a very great chance of becoming a well-rounded, compassionate, intelligent and peace-loving human being. The dream of a world populated by such people--begun by Dr. Suzuki--continues to serve as a motivating force in the promotion and growth of this movement.