

DR. SUZUKI'S SECRET: LISTEN... CAN YOU HEAR IT?

By Patricia D'Ercole

Find a piece of paper and a pencil and draw a "hefalump" if you can do it you are very smart because to my knowledge there is no such thing. However, if I asked you to draw a chair, you could ask, "What kind would you like?" A folding chair, lawn chair, rocking chair, easy chair, etc." As each of these possibilities was read, probably a mental image came to your mind. Then, depending on your artistic background you could recreate the chair by drawing the lines on the paper to match the image in your mind. If the image on the paper does not look like the one in your mind, in all likelihood you'll erase that line and try again.

Listening works the same way, but we play the tape each day to form the aural image in our mind rather than a visual one. We want the best model to be played over and over again so that we can recall it in our "mind's ear". Then, when we practice, we play that tape in our head and match what comes out of our instrument to our model. When it doesn't match, we stop and correct it. Thus, students who listen, will need less parent and teacher intervention because they will be aware of and thus correct their own mistakes. By contrast, for the student who does not listen prior to learning a piece, their own playing, however correct or incorrect, becomes the tape that is heard in the mind's ear. That is why Dr. Suzuki tells us that our progress is directly proportional to the amount of listening we do.

But there are other reasons as well. First of all, one who focuses on the model in the mind's ear will find it easier to put down the right fingers or keys. That is because subconsciously the brain is sending messages to the fingers thus developing musical intuition. Secondly, if we listen enough, the tunes continue to play in our mind long after the tape or practice has ceased. The brain is practicing in the subconscious. I know this has happened to me because sometimes barely awake, I suddenly come to the awareness that my brain is humming the piece I was playing the

night before. You'll know too that you're listening enough if you and your child are whistling or humming the repertoire while engaged in some other activity. Thirdly, the ear becomes more sensitized the more it is stimulated. While the beginning student or parent may at first only be able to hear differences in pitch and rhythm, the more advanced student will discriminate differences in dynamics, phrasing, articulation, tone color, etc. For all of these same reasons listening will help parents become better teachers too.

Many of you know Craig Timmerman as a teacher from our American Suzuki Institute. I would like to quote his experience with listening from his book Journey Down The Kreisler Highway.

"Last week I found out from a teacher here what is really meant "listening" in Japan. It means hearing the pieces particularly the shorter ones at least 50 times a day! Well, that was a real shock at first. But after more discussion, I found that, by using the audio machines at our disposal, it was easy to fill a whole side of a tape with one or two pieces and then replay the tape several times throughout the day.

By a strange coincidence, days after I learned that, I was able to test the theory for myself. Dr. Suzuki told all the student teachers one day, 'Next week we will all play together and study the Bach Corrente.' He mentioned several points to study in particular. Then we listened to Casals play the piece on a tape.

I must admit that I was in somewhat of a state of shock after this, for my ability to memorize is appallingly slow. For me to memorize a piece in only seven days seemed quite impossible. But I went home and made a special tape of the piece. Then I really began to hear it an hour a day. It is surprising that even now long after the piece was memorized, I haven't grown tired of hearing the music.

During the times when I actually listened intently I heard the points that Suzuki had emphasized. Of the many times I heard the piece each day, of course, I really only listened closely to it one or

two times. But being in the mood to test this theory, for four days I just played the tape as mentioned. Then for three days I practiced that piece about 20 minutes each day. In seven days I had it memorized! For me that is a feat of unequalled proportions and one that I shall not soon forget. Now, as I practice the piece from memory, I can think of the points that Suzuki talked of. And I get a great deal more out of the piece than would have ever been possible before."¹

Lastly, listening, any kind, is a very important part of our daily activity. In fact we spend 54.93% of our day doing it. Of the remaining time 23.19% is spent speaking, 13.27% is spent reading, and 8.61% is spent writing.² Interestingly, we have reading, writing, and speaking curriculums in our schools, but not a listening curriculum. Perhaps this is part of the reason why Suzuki students seem to excel in school. They do have a listening curriculum.

Unfortunately, it like practicing or reading needs to be made a priority in our lives and if it is, what success awaits us!

¹Craig Timmerman, Journey Down The Kreisler Highway. (Memphis TN, Ivory Palaces Music Publishing Co. 1987) p 30-31

²Chris Brewer and Don Campbell. Rhythms of Learning. (Tucson, AZ, Zepher Press 1991) p. 19

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