

## Fostering Connection in the Suzuki Harp Community

By Nikki Lemire

The 2014 Conference brought a small but enthusiastic group of harpists together for sharing, fun and fellowship. During the conference, Mary Kay Waddington piloted a new course called Revisiting Book One. The majority of the teachers attending participated in the course and thoroughly enjoyed reviewing and sharing new methods for teaching Book One pieces.

Keeping in the theme of building community, four of the conference offerings were directed towards fostering connection in the Suzuki harp community. The first session was discussion of a shared video library where we plan to have teachers submit videos that demonstrate teaching specific techniques and teaching points in pieces. These videos would be available in the future to other Suzuki teachers as a way to build on the learning in Suzuki Book One teacher training. The second session was an example of live mentoring of new teachers over Skype. We connected with a teacher in Spain while she taught a lesson to a young Book One student and offered suggestions during her teaching. The third session was a group class for the harp teachers attending the conference where we discussed and played the changes to Book Fives's Dussek Sonata in c minor, first movement. For the fourth session, we offered a master class featuring three experienced Suzuki harp teachers. The local students chosen demonstrated technical challenges we face in our students, and the experienced teachers worked on these specific points. After demonstrating their methods and solutions, they invited other teachers to share as well.

The harp teachers also attended many other fabulous sessions by other instrument presenters during the conference. We left the conference feeling energized and inspired, ready to incorporate the new ideas we had discovered! ☞



## The Twelfth International Research Symposium on Talent Education: Empathy, Innovation, and Musicianship

By Karin S. Hendricks

When Margery Aber first envisioned the International Research Symposium on Talent Education (IRSTE) more than two decades ago, she hoped to provide a forum that would accomplish two things: demonstrate the credibility of Suzuki's talent education approach through scientific research, and support Suzuki teachers in conducting personal investigations to improve and strengthen their own programs. As a result, each IRSTE has featured presentations of new research of interest to

Suzuki teachers, while also training and supporting practicing music teachers in creating their own research projects.<sup>1</sup>

This year, IRSTE co-chair Pat D'Ercole announced that the symposium has "come of age"—we now have a considerable number of Suzuki teachers who have earned doctorates and interest in research, so we are able to develop and present our own projects without outside leadership. The number of published Suzuki-related research projects is also growing; the Suzuki Method Research Bibliography<sup>2</sup> reports the publication of seventy-four studies about the Suzuki approach since 1966.

### Research "Master Class"

This was the third symposium to include a research "master class," where individuals presented research projects to the audience and then received coaching from a master researcher. This approach is unique to the IRSTE symposium, and has been well appreciated by attendees. The previous two symposia featured projects of graduate students; however, this year's symposium focused on a project that was created specifically for the symposium by the IRSTE Research Team, a group of scholars who had each presented original research projects in previous symposia.

### Featured Project: Suzuki Participation and the Development of Empathy

Over the past two years, members of the IRSTE Research Team (Pat D'Ercole, Kate Einarson, Beth Guerriero, Nancy Mitchell, and myself) have been meeting regularly via Skype to design and pilot a study observing potential relationships between Suzuki instruction and the development of empathy. Our research was guided by the following three questions:

1. Is there a significant effect of Suzuki private and/or group instruction upon parent-reported empathic character traits of children?
2. What relationships exist between parent-reported empathy ratings of children and parent beliefs, values, and commitment in music?
3. What are parent perceptions regarding the importance of group class?

We created a survey to obtain the following: 1. demographic information; 2. musical beliefs, values, commitment to private lessons, and projections toward future success; 3. beliefs and values regarding Suzuki group class; and 4. parent perceptions of child's empathic traits, as measured by the Griffith Empathy Measure.<sup>3</sup> After creating the survey, we tested it with a group of forty-eight parents whose children were enrolled in a Suzuki program in the midwestern United States. They were asked to take the survey twice: once in September, and again in March, after students had had the opportunity to participate in six months of group lessons.

*Group lessons and empathy.* While our number of pilot participants was too small to draw any general assumptions for other Suzuki students, we did find some interesting trends that we look forward to investigating in our main study. For example, the empathy ratings of those who stayed in group lessons during the six-month period started out higher and further increased in comparison to those who did not stay (or did not participate at all) in group lessons, whose scores started out lower and further decreased over the same

time period. We look forward to studying these trends with a larger sample of participants to determine if participation in Suzuki group lessons can actually lead to higher levels of empathy among children.

*Parent beliefs/values and empathy.* We found significant correlations between children's empathy scores and their parents' beliefs and values regarding the importance of music instruction, importance of Suzuki instruction, and the belief that music will help their child succeed in other areas. This suggests that children's empathy scores are related to (and perhaps influenced by) parents' beliefs regarding the importance of music instruction.

*Parent perceptions regarding group class.* On our survey, we asked parents to explain why or why not they believed group class was important for their children. Their responses centered around themes of community (teamwork, peer mentoring/modeling, friendship, social music making, belonging to the larger Suzuki community); skill development (individual technique, individual musicality, of ensemble skills); and challenges (scheduling issues, disparity between the age or level of the individual student and those of the rest of the group). We hope for these findings to be of use to the program where we piloted our survey.

*Feedback and future directions.* Dr. Robert Cutietta's comments to the IRSTE Research can be summed up by the word "focus." While he praised our use of the Griffith Empathy Measure and noted our discovery of some potentially important findings, he encouraged us to narrow purpose and research questions, keeping our project simpler and more direct. As a result of this discussion, we decided to focus more directly on our first research question (group lesson participation and the development of empathy) and save the third question (parent beliefs regarding group class) for a separate study.

Finally, comments from Suzuki teachers in the audience helped us realize the need for a descriptive overview of various group lesson formats and approaches used by teachers throughout North America—something we hope to implement in our study and share with the members of SAA.

### **Audience Discussion and Poster Session**

After Dr. Cutietta's remarks, we opened up the floor to comments and questions from the audience and then began our snacks and poster session, where attendees browsed through a row of standing posters and asked questions of researchers about their projects. This year four posters were presented: "Content Analysis: Comparison of Rolland's Teaching of Action in String Playing with Selected String Method Books" (Liz Dinwiddie & Brenda Brenner); "Does Music Instruction Using the Suzuki Method Improve Working Memory and Visual-Spatial Processing in Kindergarten Children?" (Karin Hallberg, John McClure, & William Martin); "Living Soul: Awakening the Ideals of Shinichi Suzuki, Compassion, and Spirituality in 21st Century Music Teachers" (Karin Hendricks); and "Epidemiological Evaluation of Pain and Performance Anxiety among String Instrumentalists" (Katrin Meidell).

### **Keynote Lecture by Dr. Robert Cutietta**

On Thursday evening, Dr. Cutietta provided a keynote lecture that was both a celebration of Suzuki teachers while simultaneously challenging us to awaken to new problems and possibilities in the twenty-first century. His visual aid (attaching Mounds bars to a yardstick with nails) and masterful contextualization of facts provided

one of the most captivating music education history lessons I have ever experienced.

As Dr. Cutietta described his program in popular music at the University of California, he caused many of us in attendance to reconsider what "traditional" means in contemporary music education settings. I had to ask myself: Are we as innovative and creative in our approaches as Dr. Suzuki was? Are we willing to try new techniques and approaches to the same extent that Suzuki did, or are we stuck in a tradition of sameness? While describing how many old and outdated music education structures are fading, Dr. Cutietta expressed his hope for Suzuki teachers because of our emphasis on sound musicianship—a foundation that Suzuki students can take with them no matter what musical avenue they choose in later years of study.

### **Friday Morning Session: Presentations**

Two researchers presented projects on Friday morning. First, Maureen Nilson shared research on Suzuki instruction and the prevention of performance anxiety that she completed for her studies at the University of Sheffield in England. Her study of 175 adults and 36 adolescents showed that those trained in a "strict Suzuki" approach showed higher self-esteem and lower performance anxiety than those trained in "modified Suzuki" or "traditional" approaches.

The second presentation was given by Kathleen Einarson, who worked with Laurel Trainor on a project to determine children's sensitivity to musical meter. In their study involving 32 musically untrained children, they found that the perceptual sensitivity to musical beat was significantly higher for seven-year-old children than five-year-old children. Both groups showed a perceptual bias for simple meter over complex meter, which Einarson related to other research to suggest that children's musical sensitivities are influenced by the music of their culture.

### **Final Session: Future Directions for the Empathy Project**

We concluded our symposium by bringing presenters and participants in a discussion circle, to offer some ideas for teachers regarding how they might conduct their own research projects. Our final discussion returned to the Empathy Project, where we considered how Suzuki teachers across North America might be involved in the upcoming phase of the research. The teachers and researchers in attendance offered a number of excellent ideas for the content and distribution of surveys, and we are excited to move forward with the project this coming fall.

### **Please join us!**

If you are interested in having your program or studio represented in our research, we would be thrilled to have you participate! Size or group lesson format (or even lack of group lessons) does not matter—we hope to include a variety of approaches so that we can best understand the landscape of Suzuki-based teaching in North America. If interested, please contact me at [kshendricks@bsu.edu](mailto:kshendricks@bsu.edu) or call (765) 285-5493. We are eager for your help with this important work! ☺

### **Notes**

1. Proceedings for the 2014 Symposium are available online at <http://www.uwsp.edu/suzuki/Pages/IRSTE/default.aspx>.
2. Alice Ann O'Neill, Karin S. Hendricks, Nancy Mitchell, and Elizabeth Guerriero, "Suzuki method research: A bibliography" in Proceedings of

the Twelfth International Research Symposium on Talent Education edited by Kathleen M. Einarson (Minneapolis, MN, USA: International Research Symposium on Talent Education, 2014).

3. Mark R. Dadds, Kirsten Hunter, David J. Hawes, Aaron DJ Frost, Shane Vassallo, Paul Bunn, Sabine Merz, and Yasmeen El Masry, "A measure of cognitive and affective empathy in children using parent ratings" in *Child Psychiatry and Human Development* 39, no. 2 (2008): 111-122.

## Piano at the Conference


By Gail Gebhart

I always look forward to the friendliness, nurturing, creativity, and sharing that happens when Suzuki teachers of all instruments come together. Conferences are part of my teacher health maintenance routine: I get new ideas for individual and studio teaching and get my teaching batteries recharged. At the 2014 SAA Conference, I again experienced the positive strengths and breadth of our piano community. Our clinician, Brian Ganz, generously shared his great love and understanding of music and his unique ability to convey musical ideas with each of five master class participants. Also in the master class with Brian, and in another master class given by Fay Adams, we were very fortunate to be able to hear the excellent musicianship of several young people from Latin America. Other informative and motivating master classes were given by Malgosia Lis and Brett Serrin.

No conference would be complete without a musical evening shared with our Concerto Competition winner. Ten-year-old Alex van Bibber, student of Mary Craig Powell, gave an exciting and masterful performance of the Haydn D Major piano concerto. What an amazing young man!



In other presentations, Caroline Fraser, Mary Craig Powell, and Brian Ganz shared detailed discussions of how to teach musicality, phrasing, beautiful tone, and conscious music making. Several presentations addressed processes of creating musical community. Renee Robbins gave a comprehensive presentation about creating your own *Carnival of the Animals* concert, outlining what level of playing would be required for each musical instrument and what kind of timeline would be needed. Mary Ann Ranney, Tyler Hendrickson, Annette Lee, and Kathy Wood shared many specific chamber music resources for pianists and talked about the joy, importance, benefits, and specific details of setting up successful chamber music experiences for students. An extremely thorough overview of the strengths and weaknesses of several beginning reading methods was presented by Brett Serrin and Anna Halperin. Very practical information about teaching online was shared by Michael Campbell, and an outstanding discussion of how to create, introduce, and maintain composition as an active part of your teaching curriculum was given by Nancy Modell. Jeremy Dittus, who offered a multitude of classes about Dalcroze throughout the conference, gave pianists a hands-on demonstration of improvisation using faux bourdon.

I enjoyed the high quality of presentations very much. My thanks to all the presenters for their hard work and for helping to make the conference a memorable experience. Handouts for many of the sessions are available online at the SAA website. 

## Dynamic Recorder Sessions at the Conference

By Mary Halverson Waldo

The Suzuki Recorder community reveled in dynamic new experiences at the SAA Conference. World-class recorder clinician Paul Leenhouts set the bar high with his brilliant master classes and consort coaching for students from Canada, US,



Left: Bret Serrin masterclass. Above: Paul Leenhouts masterclass. Photos by Andreas Beuschel.