

Dr. Shinichi Suzuki
October 17, 1898 – January 25, 1998



© Arthur Montzka

Approximately 400,000 Suzuki students around the world delight in studying the piano, violin, cello, viola, bass, flute, harp, recorder, trumpet, guitar, voice, and organ. Since Suzuki differs from traditional teaching methods, we offer this booklet to give interested parents an overview of the Suzuki philosophy and approach. You are invited to observe Suzuki lessons with any of our teachers to see how the method is taught at Levine.



SUZUKI METHOD
INFORMATION FOR PROSPECTIVE
FAMILIES

What is the Suzuki Method?

After witnessing the destruction of his native Japan during World War II, Dr. Shinichi Suzuki resolved to use music to help bring joy back into the lives of children. A classical violinist who believed in the remarkable abilities of young children, Dr. Suzuki developed a visionary method of teaching music.

Dr. Suzuki's method took form as he observed how easily children learn to talk, noting that they speak their native language or "mother tongue" fluently at a very young age. He noted the following important factors:

1. Instruction begins at birth with daily exposure.
2. Children hear parents' voices frequently and more often than other voices.
3. Parents reward the child's speech efforts with smiles, hugs, and praise.
4. "Practice" takes place many times throughout the day, through hearing and repeating words thousands of times.
5. Children study reading only after they establish fluency of the spoken word.

Dr. Suzuki believed these principles could be used to teach music. Given a proper home environment, learning to play music could be as natural as learning to speak. He rejected the idea that children must inherit talent to play music, believing instead that every child has the potential to develop musical abilities.



Listening

The Suzuki method is based upon Dr. Suzuki's observations that children learn to talk because language constantly surrounds them. Applying the same principles to learning music, it is essential for children to listen to recordings of Suzuki repertoire every day. By listening, children learn melodies, harmonies, rhythms, tone quality and dynamics, making it easier for them to play from memory and concentrate on acquiring good technical skills. Suzuki recordings should be played often and at a low volume level as background music. The amount of time spent listening to music each day greatly affects the child's rate of progress, so parents should play music as often as possible. Mealtime, playtime, riding in the car, falling asleep at night and waking each morning are all excellent times to play the Suzuki repertoire. Parents can also use this time to listen and learn the songs to become more effective home teachers.

Listening to the music should be a fun and enjoyable experience. Sitting children down and saying, "Listen to this" is not advisable as they may learn to dislike listening to music. Besides Suzuki repertoire, children should be continually exposed to classical music. Televised concerts, live performances and a home full of classical music will encourage children and provide memorable experiences for the entire family.

The results of Dr. Suzuki's method are amazing. Children enjoy music and play with beautiful tone and clarity beyond their years. They are not prodigies, but are normal children with parents and teachers who believe in their abilities and strive to nurture them. Often, these are the same children who excel in school and sports and have a positive self-image.

Lessons and Classes

Each child's time is individualized and may vary in length. All children are free to move at their own rate of progress. Exposure to lessons creates desire, interest, an understanding of lesson manners, technique and musical tone. Students are encouraged to come early and stay afterwards so they can observe other lessons.

The Home Teacher

Parental involvement is critical to the success of the Suzuki method. Both parents are encouraged to participate. However, only one parent takes responsibility for becoming the home teacher and attending each lesson. He or she must listen carefully, understand the points of the lesson and the assignment, and then supervise the daily home lesson. Many Suzuki parents learn to play right along with their child. Only upon approval of the teacher can another caregiver take on this role.

All incoming families are strongly encouraged to attend a Parent Orientation Class. Discussions of Suzuki philosophy, behavior at home lessons, and ideas for listening and practicing are all addressed in these classes. The home teacher will learn to play the beginning repertoire and be responsible for the listening program at home. Many practical suggestions will be given to help the Suzuki method fit into family life with joy and success.

The Home Lesson

When learning a musical instrument, practice has no substitute. To make progress, children must practice daily. As with other new activities, beginning with short practice sessions is wise, gradually increasing the length as the child's concentration level develops.

When learning the pieces in Book 1, the student is encouraged to "sound out" the melodies. The home teacher should help with any tricky parts. If the child listens regularly to the recordings, this amazing skill will develop naturally.

Music Theory, Reading and Enrichment

Children learn to read written language once they have mastered basic language skills. Likewise, Suzuki students begin to learn to read music once they have established basic playing skills.

Suzuki students are encouraged to enroll in a supplemental enrichment course to help prepare them for and help them with music reading and understanding. Suggested options are listed in the Levine catalog.

Observation Before Enrolling

Parents and prospective students are asked to observe several times before deciding to enroll in our program. This allows both parent and child to understand the Suzuki program and see different teachers at work. Most Suzuki students remain with a teacher for many years, so this observation period gives parents and students a chance to find out if they like the teacher and want to study using the Suzuki method. Parents should understand that we cannot guarantee placement with a particular teacher. Families may observe private and group classes. During observation, parents, children and teachers determine a child's interest and readiness to participate in the program.

The following are guidelines for new parents.

- ♪ Bring your child with you. Observation is the perfect time to determine your child's interest and readiness. If your child does become restless, you're welcome to leave quietly.
- ♪ Stay only as long as your child is interested.
- ♪ You may also come alone.
- ♪ You can sit or stand anywhere you can watch without interfering with the lesson.
- ♪ The teacher will usually not be able to talk with you during observation since the time is reserved for the children and parents who are taking the lesson.
- ♪ You may wish to talk with other parents outside of the teaching room.
- ♪ Observation is a great opportunity for you and your child to decide which instrument to study. If your child hasn't expressed a specific interest, we suggest observing violin, cello, flute, piano and guitar.

Observation After Enrolling

Since children learn from each other it is important to continue observation once lessons start. Beginning students will have others in their small group to watch. In addition, they are welcome to observe older, more experienced players. Hearing a student who is playing beautiful music, observing the steps to mastering those pieces and broadening one's knowledge of the repertoire can be highly motivating. Once enrolled in the Suzuki program, students should try to observe on a regular basis.



I really want to do this, but my child does not seem ready.

Do you have any suggestions?

Do not rush your child into lessons if he or she needs time to mature. If study begins too early, the experience can be difficult at best. Although your child may be very bright and musical, there is no hurry to begin. Many successful Suzuki parents and students have taken the following path before beginning lessons:

- ♪ Continue to observe weekly lessons with your child.
- ♪ Read the two recommended books by Dr. Suzuki: *Nurtured by Love* and *Ability Development from Age Zero*.
- ♪ Purchase the CD for Suzuki Book 1 and begin playing it daily. Make copies of the recording for the car, kitchen, and your child's room.
- ♪ Take the Parent Orientation class.
- ♪ Enrich your home with music and musical activities.
- ♪ Enroll in one of Levine's First Music classes.
- ♪ Delay lessons until your child is ready to ensure willingness and understanding.

If we do not begin now will we lose our chance?

Your child's interest and readiness should determine the time to begin. Spaces become available periodically. Parents should continue to observe and prepare their children for study while waiting for a space to open.

I like the Suzuki approach a great deal, but I don't think this approach will work with our lifestyle. What are my options?

Studying a musical instrument takes time and commitment from both the child and the parents. However, you may find traditional private or group instruction more appropriate. Levine has exceptional traditional faculty who love teaching. Please see the catalog for more information (www.levinemusic.org).

Frequently Asked Questions:

How will I know if my child is interested?

Ask your child. After the first observation, some children are anxious to begin and others may not have a strong reaction either way. If your child seems interested, come observe again.

Can you give me some guidelines to decide if my child is ready?

A child who is ready to begin the Suzuki method has:

- ♪ Enthusiastic interest in learning to play.
- ♪ Ability to concentrate and focus on learning a task.
- ♪ Willingness to take instruction from the teacher and parent.
- ♪ Enough time in the parent and child's schedules to devote to study an instrument.

Is my child too young to begin?

Some children are ready to begin at three or four years of age. They can follow directions, focus for short periods and practice at home willingly. It can be a joyful experience because it is something the child wants to do. If your child is not ready yet, wait and let maturity come naturally. There is no hurry to begin.

Is my child too old for Suzuki lessons?

Since all children are unique, the time for each child to begin varies. Even adults can study Suzuki method. Dr. Suzuki said, "Let's begin, for you are younger today than you will be tomorrow."

What sort of time commitment should I expect if we enroll?

Practicing: Each day you will need to set aside focused, relaxed and uninterrupted time to spend with your child. It is helpful if this is a time when your child is alert and interested. At first your child may spend only a short time with the instrument several times a day. Just be sure to practice repeatedly each day. As your child progresses, plan for thirty minutes or more for the home lesson. This will extend to forty-five minutes and eventually one hour or more each day. Longer practice times could be broken down in to two or more sessions. You may also need some practice time for yourself.

Listening: We recommend that the CD be played a minimum of two hours each day. This is best played quietly as background music during wake-up, meals, playtime, in the car, and when falling asleep at night. It is your responsibility as the home teacher to make sure the CDs are playing. It's not something that you discuss with your child.

Lessons, Group Classes & Observations: Weekly time commitment varies by instrument, but is generally more than once a week.

Play-ins, informal recitals, recitals, home concerts, parent discussion groups, and workshops: These opportunities may be scheduled throughout the year to enrich your experience and may change from year to year.

I believe my child is ready for lessons, but the teacher disagrees. How does the teacher know if my child is ready for lessons?

Our teachers have spent many years and hours with different students and are experts in the field of instruction. The teacher knows what qualities and maturity level are needed for formal study. If you have questions regarding your child's readiness, you may discuss this with the teacher during a scheduled interview.

How do I start observations?

Fill out a "New Student Information" form (via website: www.levinmusic.org) or contact the appropriate department chair.

What You Will Need

Suzuki Music Books & CDs

Parents should purchase Suzuki Book 1 for their instrument.
Contact department chair for recommendations.

Books

Both parents should read *Nurtured by Love* and *Ability Development from Age Zero* by Dr. Shinichi Suzuki. These books can be checked out from Levine's Suzuki Library in Room 115 at the NW campus or purchased online.

Where to Obtain Materials

Foxes Music (703-533-7393)

416 S. Washington Street
Falls Church, VA 22046

www.foxesmusic.com

Delivers music & Suzuki items directly to Levine.

Young Musicians (800-826-8648)

www.ymonline.com

Offers music, Suzuki items, footstools and seat cushions at a discount.

Middle C Music (202-244-7326)

4530 Wisconsin Avenue, N.W.
Washington DC 20016

www.middlecmusic.com

Music and Arts Centers (301-881-6440; 1-800-237-7760)

12274 Rockville Pike #K
Rockville, MD 20852

www.musicarts.com

Potter Violins

(301-652-7070)

7711 Eastern Ave.

Takoma Park, MD 20912

Kirkpatrick Guitar Shop

(410-242-2744)

4607 Maple Avenue

Baltimore, MD 21227

<http://kirkpatrickguitar.com/>

(By appointment only; any item can be shipped to your home.)



Online:

www.amazon.com

<https://suzukiassociation.org/store/books/>

Levine Suzuki Chairs

Rebecca Carey

Flute

rcarey@levinemusic.org

202.686.8000 x1002

Alexandra Viloteau

Guitar

aviloteau@levinemusic.org

202.686.8000 x1156

Susan Katsarelis

Strings

skatsarelis@levinemusic.org

202.686.8000 x1565

Amanda Halstead

Piano

ahalstead@levinemusic.org

202.686.8000 x1640