

Suzuki Approach

The Suzuki approach, based on the so-called 'mother-tongue' method, differ from traditional methods of teaching instrumental music because it involves the student at a very early age, thus necessitating much participation on the part of the parent (usually the mother) in the role of home-teacher. Some of the basic principles and ingredients of the Suzuki approach are:

Begin as early as possible.

Dr. Suzuki recommends that ability development begins at birth. Formal training may be started by age 3.

Move in small steps so the child can master the material with a total sense of success, thereby building his confidence and enthusiasm for learning. Each child progresses at his own pace.

Either the mother or the father attends all lessons so that he/she understand the learning process, and can feel secure when working with the child as home teacher. To this end, the parent receives initial instruction in correct playing posture and all of the beginning steps including the playing of a simple piece. The most important single ingredient for success is the parent's willingness to devote regular time to work closely with the child and the teacher.

Daily listening to recordings of the Suzuki repertoire as well as good music in general, is the nucleus of the Suzuki approach. The more student and his/her home teacher listens to their recordings, the more quickly the student learns. This approach derives from the way all normal children learn to speak their native languages.

Follow the Suzuki repertory sequence, for the most part, so that each piece becomes a building block for the careful development of technique. Equally important is the string motivation this standardized repertoire provides; students want to play what they hear other students play. Constant repetition of the old pieces in a student's repertoire is the secret of the performing ability of Suzuki students.

Create in lessons and home practice an enjoyable learning environment, so that much of the child's motivation comes from enthusiasm for learning and desire to please. When working with children we should remember Dr. Suzuki's exhortation that we must come "down to their physical limitations and up to their sense of wonder and awe.

Group lessons and participating in recitals, in addition to private lessons, and observation of other students' lessons are valuable aids to motivation. The child learns from advanced student and from his peers possible more than he/she does from his/her adult teacher directly. Children love to do what they see other children do.

Foster an attitude of cooperation, not competition, among students, of supportiveness for each other's accomplishment.

The Suzuki approach deals with much more than teaching a child how to play an instrument. It seeks to develop the whole child, to help unfold his/her natural potential to learn and become a good and happy person. The purpose of Suzuki training is not to produce great artists, but to help every child to find the joy that comes through music making. Through the Suzuki growing process, children thrive in a total environment of support; they develop confidence and self-esteem,

determination to try difficult things, self-discipline and concentration, as well as a lasting enjoyment of music, and the sensitivity and skill for making music.

Suzuki Teaching Objectives

- A parent understands the Suzuki learning process.
- A parent understands why she/he needs to commit to home practice with her/his child.
- A parent is able to create positive musical environment at home for the child.
- A parent feels secure as a home teacher.
- A parent knows how to organize the home lessons.
- A student develops good ear step by step so that he/she can play by ear.
- A student uses her/his ear to execute proper technique to create the most beautiful singing tone on the piano.
- A student plays compositions with correct notes, rhythm, fingers, dynamics, articulations, phrasing and balancing using proper technique and style.
- A student reads music according to his/her level.
- A student masters music theory step by step to enhance his/her understanding of keyboard musicianship, analysis of compositions and playing.
- A student knows how to practice at home.
- A student enjoys music and music learning process.

- A student feels good about himself by experiencing the result of small step piano learning and practicing.
- A student is well prepared for performances and performs with confidence.
- A student becomes a lifelong classical music lover and supporter.
- A student becomes a disciplined, hard-working and cooperative person through piano learning process.

Information for Prospective Suzuki Parents and Students

1. 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:

- * Instruction begins at birth with daily exposure.
- * Children hear parents' voices frequently and more often than other voices.

- * Parents reward the child's speech efforts with smiles, hugs, and praise.
- * "Practice" takes place many times throughout the day, through hearing and repeating words thousands of times.
- * 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.

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.

"Every child improves depending on his parents" -Dr. Suzuki

2. Hearing Suzuki Repertoire

The Suzuki method is based upon Dr. Suzuki's observations that children learn

to talk because language constantly surrounds them. Children would have difficulty learning to talk if they did not have the opportunity to hear their parents speak and mimic their conversations. Applying the same principles to learning music, it is essential for children to hear recordings of Suzuki repertoire every day. By saturated hearing, 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. Parents should put on Suzuki recordings daily along with other classical music and parents enjoy at a low volume level as background music.

The amount of time spent hearing 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 hear and learn the songs to become more effective home teachers.

Hearing 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/ on line concerts, live performances and a home full of good music, including CD's from the library, will encourage children and provide memorable experiences for the entire family.

3. Suzuki Triangle: Teacher, Parent and Child

Teacher is responsible for:

- Training the parent to be an effective home teacher to the child.
- Teaching the child how to play with beautiful tone, technique and interpretation

Parent is responsible for:

- Putting on Suzuki Recording for both parents and child to hear daily at home and during car rides.
- Attending all child's lessons and understanding of points of each lesson.
- Daily practice with the child which includes:
 - Creating the proper environment so the child will have a successful learning experience.
 - Playing the recording as requested by the teacher.
 - Assisting the child with memorizing a piece as needed.
 - Teaching and supervising the daily home lesson.

Child is responsible for being a child which means:

- The child will learn from whatever is put in his environment.
Most children enjoy learning music by ear if given the opportunity and proper surroundings.

- Gradually children learn to assume responsibility for their work as they mature, but it takes time and cannot be rushed.
- Children become responsible, cooperative and disciplined, not because parents tell them they should be, but rather because they see their parents behaving these ways and follow their examples.

4. The Home Coach/ Parental Involvement

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 is to listen carefully, understand the points of the lesson and the assignment, and then teach and supervise the daily home lesson. Many Suzuki parents learn to play right along with their child(ren). Only upon approval of the teacher can another caregiver take on this roll.

The home coach will learn to play the Twinkle Variations and be responsible for beginning the listening program at home (if not already started).

Many practical suggestions will be given to help the Suzuki method fit into family life with joy and success.

"If you have the spirit of a young man, you never age. " - Dr. Suzuki

5. The Home Practice

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 their length as the child's concentration level develops. Mornings are a highly desirable time for the home lesson, as concentration and patience are often at their best early in the day.

Children will enjoy home practice if they are made enjoyable for both parent and child. Children must be supported with compliments. Parents should find at least one thing to praise after each attempt. Criticism and scolding will not help them learn faster. Children will be more secure knowing that their parents are enthusiastic about their achievements. The Twinkle Variations (the first pieces) are taught by the instructor. When learning the other 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.

6. Observation

Observation is an integral part of the Suzuki approach.

All students begin their Suzuki training with weekly observations before committing to Suzuki Lessons. Once lessons begin, students continue to observe weekly or as often as their teacher requires.

Below are some guidelines to help make the observation process more valuable.

7. Observation before Enrolling

Parents and prospective students are asked to observe a minimum of six times before deciding to enroll in my program. This allows both parent and child to understand the Suzuki program and see the teacher 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. Families may observe private, group classes and studio recitals. During observation, parents, children and teachers determine a child's interest and readiness to participate in the program.

8. Pre-Requisite before Scheduling Your First Observation

Once all the songs in Suzuki Piano Book 1 are familiar to you and your child(ren) by listening to recording at least 2 weeks, then schedule your observation. This way, observation will be happier and meaningful experience for you and your child.

9. Guidelines for Observers at the Studio

- Bring your child(ren) with you.
Observation is the perfect time to determine your child's interest and readiness. During observation, please keep your child respectfully quiet so as not to distract the students taking lessons. If your child does become restless, please leave quietly and return at a time when your child is more focused.
- Stay only as long as your child is interested. You may leave quietly at any time.
- You can sit or stand anywhere you can see keyboard and hands 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.

Please observe what's happening following my guidelines which will be provided for you at each lesson. All observations are free of charge.

10. 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 piano music can be highly motivating. Whenever possible, students at the same age and level are scheduled at coordinating times during the week to make the most of this important facet of Suzuki instruction. Once enrolled in the Suzuki program, students should try to observe one or two lessons each week on a regular basis.

11. 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. This is at the teacher's discretion and usually begins once the students play hands together well with correct body balance.

Suzuki piano students are encouraged to play music theory games to help prepare them for and help them with music reading and understanding.

12. Private Lessons for Beginners

The home coach will learn to play the Pre-Twinkle skills and Twinkle Variations and be responsible for beginning the listening program at home (if not already

started). Many practical suggestions will be given to help the Suzuki method fit into family life with joy and success.

Once the home coach is ready to go, the students will start their first Pre-Twinkle lessons. Once the students mastered the basic skills of piano playing (body balance: rest position, ready position, Pre-Twinkle A though Pre-Twinkle D), they are ready to start the first song in Book 1, Twinkle Twinkle Little Star Variations.

13. 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:

- 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 piano consistently.

-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 into the middle of Book 1, 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 should be broken down into two or more sessions. You may also need some practice time for yourself.

Saturated Hearing/Listening: I recommend that the recording be played constantly all day and all night. This is best played quietly as background music during waking-up, meals, playtime, in the car, and when falling asleep at night. It is parent's responsibility as the home coach (parent) to put on recording (CD) . It's not something that you discuss with your child.

Lessons: As your child's attention increases, your lesson time will be thirty, forty-five, or sixty minutes. You should continue to observe other lessons weekly and participate in an enrichment course.

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

-How do I start observations?

Purchase Suzuki Piano Book 1 recording and have you and your child listen at least for 2 weeks to be familiar before scheduling your first observation via e-mail or phone.

-How many times must my child and I observe before we can start lessons?

Parents and prospective students are asked to observe a minimum of six times

before enrolling in my studio. The observation time is an ongoing process. Once students start observing, they continue throughout their Suzuki study.

Please observe at least a minimum six times before formal instruction can begin. However, most students observe weekly for many months before a spot opens. Should you and your child commit to the program, you should plan on observing weekly. After a month or so of regular observation, you may schedule an interview with me to see if your child is ready and if there is availability. If it is not the right time to begin lessons for your child, you should continue to observe weekly as it is an important part of Suzuki study.

-I've been observing for almost a year, why can't my child start lessons yet?
There are many reasons for a delay in starting lessons. The child may not be ready to begin, there may not be a space that is open, or your schedule may not permit you to come during the time when the teacher has an opening. Please be patient and continue observing.

-I believe my child is ready for lessons, but the teacher disagrees. How does the teacher know if my child is ready for lessons?
The teacher has spent many years and hours with different students and are experts in the field of instruction. The teacher knows what qualities and maturity level is needed for formal study. If you have questions regarding your child's readiness, you may discuss this with the teacher during a

scheduled interview.

-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 listening it daily. Make copies of the recording for the car, kitchen, and your child's room.
- Enrich your home with music and musical activities.
- 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 and are almost always found for interested students. 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 method is more appropriate.

14. Suzuki Music Books

There are seven books in the Suzuki Piano School. Parents should purchase Suzuki Piano Book 1. Book 1 begins with Twinkle Variations and contains simple folk songs. The remaining books contain classical repertoire including pieces by Bach, Beethoven, Clementi, Mozart, Schumann, Handel and others.

In the early stages of Suzuki study, music books are intended for the home coach's use only. Students' progress by playing music from memory during home and studio lessons, which permits them to focus on learning and enjoying the music. Music reading is introduced to students at a later stage of study. Your teacher will recommend beginning reading books at that time.

15. Recordings (CDs)

Parents should purchase Suzuki Piano Book 1. Suzuki recommends listening to Suzuki repertoire at least two years ahead of the level at which the student is studying so parents should begin to acquire and enjoy the

other volumes as well. Keep copies of the recordings in convenient locations such as your kitchen, car and your child's bedroom and play them often.

16. Required Reading for Parents

Both parents should read 'Nurtured by Love' and 'Ability Development from Age Zero' by Dr. Shinichi Suzuki.

17. Footstools and Seat Pads

Of all the Suzuki instruments, the piano is the only one that cannot be constructed in smaller sizes suitable for children. Solid footstools and seat pads (booster) are needed to seat your child at the proper height during the home and studio lessons. This will encourage good hand position, ease body strain and promote good posture. Ask your teacher for advice on what to use.