

Listening

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As we discussed in the Every Child Can! segment of class, listening is essential to the progress of the Suzuki student. Music is sound. It is what we hear. The "music book" is a graphic representation of the sounds intended so that they can be reproduced. It is important for students to have a concept of the piece before they try to learn it. Listening to the reference recording provides a model for the piece: by listening, the child becomes familiar with the notes of the piece, the rhythm, the tone, the tempo, interpretation and the structure of the work. This model enables the student to self-correct while practicing, and to evaluate their own performance.

All Suzuki students listen to recordings of the repertoire to be learned. This exposure to music frequently begins before the first lesson; many teachers recommend daily listening long before a child is ready to begin formal study.

Suzuki called this concept of learning by listening the "mother-tongue" approach. Observing that children learned to speak their native language perfectly, Suzuki concluded that this was due to their total immersion in the language from birth. His method of music education relies on a similar approach to teaching the musical repertoire. By exposing a child to recordings of the music he or she will eventually play, the music becomes internalized. When the child already knows how a piece is supposed to sound, learning to play that piece becomes a simpler process, and memorization occurs naturally.

Dr. Suzuki believed children's mother-tongue intuition and ability evolves from listening, so children learn music by listening to recordings or live performances rather than reading sheet music. Reading music is usually delayed until the student is quite advanced because Dr. Suzuki thought music learning should mimic first language acquisition, which happens without textbooks. Just as parents provide a role model for how to speak, watching and listening to musical performers teaches children technical skills as well as nuances of pitch and tone. Before beginning a new piece of music, the child should listen to a recording several times and should continue listening to the recording while learning the piece.

Suzuki families listen daily to the recording of the book they are currently studying.

Daily listening:

- develops our ears for note sequences
- helps us recognize patterns in the music
- aids in memorizing the music
- helps us recognize and reproduce beautiful tone, dynamics, and phrasing
- makes learning the pieces easier
- helps us identify wrong notes

We encourage two types of listening:

- playing the recording in the background during other activities
- concentrated or intentional listening

Strategies:

- Make copies of the CD so you can listen in different places (bedroom, car, living room).
- Record both the current and next piece for concentrated listening.
- Listen to the next book level for variety.
- Identify the titles and composers.
- Sing the melodies.
- Listen for the week's practice focus from your lesson (loud/soft, staccato/legato, etc.).

The more frequently the students listen to the recordings, the more easily they learn to play.

Constant listening to music performed with beautiful tone provides children with a role model for their playing. In the lessons, the production of fine tone and sensitive playing is stressed from the beginning. The teacher serves as a model.

Dr. Suzuki emphasized the importance of daily music listening (whether it be classical music on the radio or the Suzuki Method CDs) to develop the musical ear and learn the repertoire in the Method. Constant listening of beautiful tone is a good role-model for the ear.

I find that I am always stressing listening to the recordings with my beginning students. They listen diligently to book 1. I then sometimes find that as they progress to book 2 or 3, they do not continue to listen. I have to remind myself to stress listening at all levels.

It is crucial that students LISTEN TO THE SUZUKI CDs DAILY!!! Encourage families to keep them in the car, in the house, on an ipod, etc. Encourage students to listen to other volumes of the Suzuki repertoire in addition to the current volume being studied so they get inspired and don't get bored of the same material. One very fine teacher has his book 1 students listen to the book 1 CD and the book 4 CD so they get a vision of where they are going with their playing.

Students who listen to the pieces regularly usually learn each piece with ease.

A colleague often says that 'Suzuki' is like a recipe. Just like a cake does, 'Suzuki' needs all of the ingredients included if it is to be a success! That is a good analogy. Dr Suzuki encouraged us to create a nurturing environment which would guarantee the success of every student. He agreed that some students adapt more quickly than others within this environment, but the outcome for each can be success.

Just like our cake recipe's list of ingredients, the ingredients of a positive Suzuki experience are clearly set out.

Here are some of them:

An early beginning, good listening habits, parent involvement, a well-qualified teacher who has good rapport with the parent and student, a good quality instrument, lots of praise, consistent practice, performing for others. However, there is one which works as 'magically' as does baking powder in the cake recipe so we are going to single it out. It is:

Listening to the recordings!

I have always known and believed this, so why was I surprised when one of my students, whose brother was already a Suzuki student when he was born, decided to try to find the note of the next piece in the repertoire when at a lesson one day – and he played every single note without hesitation. It was one of my teaching's golden moments! I have heard so many stories like this. Having often taught the third sibling in a family, I know that listening to so many repetitions of both the recording and the others practicing or at lessons has made their learning so easy. There is never any hesitation when it comes to correct notes and rhythms. Even the dynamic nuances and the articulation seem to almost 'just happen'. Unfortunately, many of our students do not have the luxury of being the next child in the family – most are the first to learn the instrument, so the best we can do is to *play that recording!* Sheila Warby, a Suzuki piano teacher from Sydney, Australia, has good advice. She says that the best finger exercise for parents is to *press that start button!*

There is a moment in the film 'Nurtured by Love' which I love – a little Japanese boy is riding his tricycle and playing in the sand-pit, and strapped to his back is a cassette player. Now there's a good idea. Certainly it seems that the younger the age of the child when the listening begins, the more effective the listening. However, any time is a good time – bath time, tea-time, wake-up time, going to sleep time, driving in the car time – for Suzuki listening. If the recording can be played for 3 hours a day the results will speak for themselves. The music does not have to be obtrusive, just audible. Sometimes it is referred to as 'wallpaper music'.

Other listening can be more directed, for example it can be danced to, drawn or painted to or used along with percussion instruments or body percussion. Small sections of the pieces can be listened to over and over again if there are any problems. The current new piece can be set on 'repeat' and played many times. At bed time it is good to advance the recording to the current piece so that it is heard before the child goes to sleep.

Even more specific listening can take place when the student is able to work with the score. Press that repeat button, sit with the score and pencil in anything helpful.

I often say to the older students, "Do you want to learn quickly or slowly?" The answer is usually "quickly"! Then, I say to them, *listen lots!*

Unfortunately, students are not aware of the amazing benefits of listening, even although they can sing TV commercials, and songs they hear frequently without really knowing how they do. So even when the students are perfectly capable of pressing that start button themselves, doing so continues to be the parent's responsibility. Perhaps by the time they are 15 or 16 they will do it for themselves!

So, encourage families to play the Suzuki recordings and enjoy them. The music is beautiful. Do not limit listening to the current book, but enjoy the beautiful music that awaits.

On the SAA webinar, "Parents As Partners Online, Michele Horner, a Suzuki guitar teacher mother of a Suzuki violin student, presented a lecture entitled "Listen Like a Maniac." Here is a synopsis of her presentation.

"Here's a tip that will make the job of all Suzuki parents much easier:

Play the Suzuki CD Repeatedly for your child every day. Parents who want to jump start their child's motivation and/or help their children progress in the easiest and smoothest way possible through the Suzuki repertoire buy into the concept of repeated daily listening to the CD. Suzuki is based on the model of language learning. Infants are surrounded at all times with their native language. Imagine if an infant only heard their native language for 15 minutes a day. That would seem ridiculous, right? Yet, many times, parents neglect playing the Suzuki CD for their child or only play the CD one time a day. YIKES! This is akin to expecting their child to speak fluently without hearing the language.

It is the parent's job to play the CD for their child! I had a young student who was struggling to remember Lightly Row, yet could sing all the words to an entire Pearl Jam album. Guess what music was being played repeatedly at home. Guess which music wasn't being played at home. Suzuki parents universally want the best for their children. Parents commit to bringing their kids twice weekly to lessons and to practicing with them every day, yet without the necessary component of repeated daily listening to the Suzuki CD, all of their efforts may be stalled or diminished. So, what's the best way to listen? I call it: "Listening Like a Maniac"

Parents must make the commitment to play the Suzuki CD every day. If you don't play it, they won't hear it! I challenge all Suzuki parents to take the Listening Challenge and play the CD 100 days in a row. Kids routinely do 100-day Practice Challenges. I'm throwing down the 100-day gauntlet to parents. Try it, and see what happens!

Use the "magic button." The "repeat one" function on your CD player or computer is the magic button. I used to make Magic CDs of my daughter's current piece and the next two pieces ten times in a row each. This became hard to keep up because my daughter progressed through the pieces on those CDs so quickly that I was having trouble making CDs fast enough. Then I discovered "repeat one." Now we listen to her current piece on "repeat one" for an hour, and then change to the next piece. Some of my students have completed two Suzuki books/year by doing this type of listening. You use repetition in practicing. Why not incorporate repetition into your listening regimen too?"

Gilda Barston