

How and Why We Review

—Michelle Baylor, November 2009

After several weeks of lessons, we're getting closer to having some songs ready for review! But wait, you've already heard them all 1,000 times on the CD and your student has been practicing them for ages. Do we really need to keep playing them? The answer is yes, and here are the whys and hows of review.

Why should review be part of every practice?

Success—Your student has worked very hard to build the memory, skills, and technique to successfully play each piece. Don't waste all his/her efforts! Let your student have a secure time of success in teach practice and lesson by making sure there is time to play songs that are comfortable and familiar. Review helps remind your student and yourself of the things that are going well and the progress that has been made.

Skills—There is much more involved in playing the piano than just pushing the right key at the right time. Correct notes are only the beginning! Review is the part of practice that develops posture, muscle memory, agility, speed, accuracy, dynamics, expression, and many other skills. When the notes become familiar, other techniques can be developed and polished.

Performance—Keeping songs polished through review practice means your student always has something to play for others. When grandma comes to visit and says "How are piano lessons going?" he can show her! When a friend says "Wow, you have a piano. Can you play it?" she can confidently do so! Review songs are ready to go, providing a positive way for your student to share his/her developing talent with others.

Foundation—Each song in the Suzuki repertoire builds on concepts learned in previous songs. Students earn the right to learn new music by demonstrating a solid understanding of the old music. Success in harder songs is based on the secure foundation of skills acquired in easier songs.

Freedom—Review songs provide the perfect time for your student to explore. Encourage him/her to experiment with different tempos, dynamics, moods, positions on the keyboard—get creative! A secure foundation is the jumping off point for originality, expression, and developing an individual style of interpretation. Lightly Row today becomes a Beethoven sonata tomorrow, and review fosters the growth of the musicality needed for more mature pieces.

What should we review?

- **Twinkles**—The Twinkle variations contain the basic techniques needed in most of the songs your student will ever play. Use them to review until you are 45!
- **The Review Piece**—After your student has learned a few review songs, I will select a specific review piece each week and give you a specific goal for that piece. Listen for completion of that goal every day during review.
- **Other Songs**—Don't just review the one song I wrote down! In Book 1, your student should play at least 3 of the songs he/she knows every day. Use the review picture cards to make sure you don't miss any.

What happens if we skip review?

OK, lets be honest here. I know that every single song won't get practiced seven days a week. However, there are definitely some consequences if you and your child don't make comprehensive review part of your practice routine.

- Your child will feel frustrated or embarrassed at lesson when they have trouble playing a song I ask for.
- Skills will have to be re-learned in later pieces if they are not maintained through review of easier songs.
- Your child's confidence will suffer if there aren't any songs she can play well.
- Practice and lesson time could become more tense if the child feels like he is always playing at the outer edge of his ability, barely hanging on and working incredibly hard to achieve results.
- The learning process gets stalled. When your child learned to talk, you didn't teach her to say "Mommy" one day and then never use the word again! Learning is only complete when the skills are strongly established and easily applied.

How can we make practicing review songs more interesting?

- Play the sections of your review song in a mixed up order (the scramble game).
- Play 2-4 measure, then sing the right hand of the next 2-4 measures, then play the next 2-4 and so on.
- Play name that tune—student plays the review song of his choice and parent has to guess the title! Make it more interesting by starting a song somewhere besides the beginning, or playing only the left hand.
- Play with a bell. When the parent rings the bell somewhere during the song, the student continues to play with only the left hand, or only the right hand, or louder, or quieter, or...