

Introduction to the Suzuki Method

—Michelle Baylor, August 2009

Who was Shinichi Suzuki?

Shinichi Suzuki, born in Japan in 1898, was the son of a violin manufacturer. Suzuki began to learn to play the violin as a teenager after hearing a recording of a famous violinist named Mischa Elman. In 1921, Suzuki traveled to Germany to study further. He marveled at the fact that although each language is marvelously complex, he had learned Japanese with little effort while young children around him spoke German much better than he ever would. He began to think that just as every child could learn his mother tongue, so also every child could learn music. He returned to Japan and began teaching small children based on this mother tongue philosophy. Surviving the Japanese depression and World War 2, he also began to hope that learning music would not only teach a skill, but would mold children's characters. He continued to teach and refine his method and it was eventually introduced in the United States in the early 1960s.

What characteristics make up the Suzuki Method?

- Ongoing immersion in a musical environment from a very young age
- Emphasis on a positive lesson and practice environment
- Repetition and review
- Lessons and practice time with parents
- Using a standard musical repertoire
- Success achieved through small steps
- Learning to read music later
- Belief that every child can succeed

What is the Mother Tongue analogy?

Just as with babies and toddlers learning their native language, music can be taught through...

...**hearing**: constant, ongoing, relevant, long-term exposure

...**response**: attempts are rewarded with positive acknowledgment and small steps of progress are celebrated

...**repetition**: difficulties are practiced repeatedly, and new concepts become solidified through continual use

...**review**: first steps are continually used and a foundation is built for future progress

...**relationship**: role modeling, encouraging, coaching, and guidance from loving parents and teacher

...**individual pacing**: patience, gradual progress rather than instant gratification

...**reading**: develops later when the basics are established

What makes Suzuki different from other methods?

Traditional

Students often start at age 6-8

Emphasis on music reading

New concepts introduced through exercises and made-up or simplified pieces

Pieces are learned and then forgotten

Parents may or may not be involved in lessons or practice

Suzuki

Students can start as young as 3 or 4

Emphasis on listening and creating beautiful sound

New concepts introduced first through folk songs, later through classical literature

Pieces are learned and reviewed continually

Parents attend lessons and help with practice

Why do students like Suzuki?

Suzuki music lessons offer customized instruction that fits with a variety of learning styles. Students are able to feel truly successful because they are taught in small, achievable steps that progress toward a larger goal. Creativity and expression are encouraged. Fun activities and games are used to teach and review learning. The ability to share music with others is developed. Positive interactions and direct encouragement from parent and teacher build confidence. Daily uninterrupted time with a parent during practice sessions builds a valuable parent-child bond.

Why do parents like Suzuki?

Their children learn valuable life skills like persistence, working toward long-term goals, and sharing their gifts with others. A lifelong bond with their child can be nurtured through daily focused time together. Music becomes a lifelong gift, not just a temporary activity the child explores for a brief time.