

The Benefits of Listening

—Michelle Baylor, October 2009

One of the things that makes the Suzuki Method unique is its emphasis on listening. From the first lesson, or even before the first lesson, the recordings of the repertoire should be played daily to begin building a rich musical environment.

Why is listening so important?

Music is sound. Plain and simple. Music that sounds beautiful comes from musicians who know what beautiful music sounds like! Learning also happens through sound. Remember, a baby normally learns the majority of his/her language just by hearing it endlessly in a supportive environment. The language of music can be learned this way as well. Students who listen regularly to their repertoire have an easier time learning, memorizing, and retaining the music. They are also able to become more independent and correct themselves, since their ear knows what the correct sound is and can distinguish between the correct model and an incorrect production by the fingers. Finally, listening becomes a tool to expand the musician's style, sensitivity, and musical interpretation skills.

What should we listen to?

- First and foremost, the Suzuki volume that your student is working on! Every day! Really!
- Other volumes of Suzuki—good for remembering songs already learned or getting a head start on what is coming up
- Other instruments of Suzuki—especially in book 1, there are many songs in common between the instruments. Even as the repertoire gets different, the music is still well performed and is a good exposure to other instruments.
- Variety of other good music—the more styles and types, the better! Try something neither of you have ever heard before, like music from a different country, or opera, or country Western, or Big Band jazz.
- Live concerts—Colorado Symphony is great, but even a church Christmas choir performance or a school orchestra concert provides an opportunity to develop better listening skills and be exposed to another kind of music.
- Borrow CDs from me, from the library, or from friends.

Where and when should we listen?

Listening doesn't necessarily mean sitting with rapt attention staring at the CD player. Keep your copy of the Suzuki CD in a convenient place and have it playing as background music as much as possible. For our family, that means it stays in the CD player in the kitchen. I push play at breakfast, leave the "Repeat" button on, and off we go. For your family, that might mean it is the CD in your car and your main listening time is on the way to and from school. For my mom, that meant we had a CD player in our rooms and she pushed play while we were getting ready for bed and let it go until after we fell asleep. Other good listening times are during meals, while doing homework, or in the family room/play room/wherever playtime happens. The important thing is to have AT LEAST one time per day SCHEDULED for listening. If you wait until you remember, you'll forget. Right now, fill in this sentence and then keep your word!

We will listen to our Suzuki CD (where) _____ every day at (when) _____.

How should we listen?

Much of the listening, especially in Book 1 and into Book 2, is an environmental experience. (Yep, that's a fancy way of saying background noise!) Just as with spoken language, the goal is to have the music surround the child to allow the ear and the brain to acquire knowledge at their own pace. Later, more of the listening will become active or participatory, involving greater focus and attention from the student.

How can listening be fun?

- Listen to a single song and then immediately have the child play that song while it is fresh in his/her head.
- Listen for something specific in the music—Stand up every time you hear a LH chord, or wave when you hear the part where the student usually makes a mistake.
- Pause the CD at the end of a song and have the student hum the song that comes next, or pause in the middle of a song and have them hum the next section.
- Sing the melody with the music—hum, sing la-la-la, or use the syllables of your child's name.
- Try singing the LH or accompaniment part while your child sings melody. Then switch parts (I bet they'll be better than you are at it!)
- Draw a picture that mimics what the music sounds like (lines going up for high sounds, or thick lines for loud sounds, or wiggly lines for fast sounds, etc.)
- Draw a picture that relates to the title of the music (A camel for Chant Arab or kids at play for Little Playmates)
- Move to the music—BOTH of you, not just your child! March, skip, walk, wiggle, jump, crawl, run, and dance.