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Learning Music the Suzuki Way

introductory information for parents

To Parents: this document will give you some basic information about the Suzuki approach to learning music. It is intended to help inform your decision to begin flute lessons with Zara Lawler. This material was adapted from *The Suzuki Twinkler*, © 1998, Suzuki Association of the Americas, Inc. For more information, please see <http://suzukiassociation.org>, or feel free to contact Zara with your questions (contact information above).

Every Child Can Learn

More than fifty years ago, Japanese violinist [Shinichi Suzuki](#) realized the implications of the fact that children the world over learn to speak their native language with ease, and began to apply the basic principles of language acquisition to the learning of music. Suzuki called his method the **mother-tongue approach**.

Some of the key ideas of the Suzuki approach are:

Parent Involvement

Just like when a child learns to talk, parents are involved in their child's musical learning. They attend lessons with the child and serve as "home teachers," practicing with the student during the week, and working with the teacher to create an enjoyable learning environment. Parental involvement changes over time, as the child matures and needs more independence.

Listening

Children learn words after hearing them spoken hundreds of times by others. Listening to music *every day* is important, especially listening to pieces in the Suzuki repertoire so the child knows them deeply.

Repetition

Constant repetition is essential in learning to play an instrument. Children do not learn a word or piece of music and then discard it. They add it to their vocabulary or repertoire, gradually using it in new and more sophisticated ways. Similarly, the Suzuki approach includes regular review of "old" pieces as well as learning new and more difficult repertoire as the student progresses.

Encouragement

As with language, the child's effort to learn an instrument should be met with sincere praise and encouragement. Each child learns at his/her own rate, building on small steps so that each one can be mastered.

Learning with Other Children

In addition to individual lessons, children participate in regular group lessons and performances at which they learn from and are motivated by each other. Children are also encouraged to support each other's efforts, fostering an attitude of generosity and cooperation.

Delayed Reading

Children learn to read after their ability to talk has been well established. In the same way, children should develop basic technical competence on their instruments and other important pre-reading skills (like keeping a steady beat) before being taught to read music. Once those basic skills are in place, a thorough, step-by-step approach to music reading is used.

How does Talent Education differ from other methods of teaching music to children?

Thoughtful teachers have often used some of the elements listed here, but Suzuki has formulated them in a cohesive approach. Some basic differences are:

- Suzuki teachers believe that musical ability can be developed in *all* children.
- Students may begin at young ages.
- Parents play an active role in the learning process.
- Children become comfortable with the instrument before learning to read music.
- Technique is taught in the context of pieces rather than through dry technical exercises.
- Pieces are refined through regular review.
- Students perform frequently, individually and in groups.

The Suzuki Legacy

Shinichi Suzuki was a violinist, educator, philosopher and humanitarian. Born in 1898, he studied violin in Japan for some years before going to Germany in the 1920s for further study. After the end of World War II, Dr. Suzuki devoted his life to the development of the method he calls Talent Education. Suzuki based his approach on the belief that

Musical ability is not an inborn talent but an ability which can be developed. Any child who is properly trained can develop musical ability, just as all children develop the ability to speak their mother tongue. The potential of every child is unlimited.

Dr. Suzuki's goal was not simply to develop young musicians, but to nurture loving human beings and help develop each child's character through the study of music.