



# Arizona Suzuki Association Winter 2009 Newsletter

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## THE SUZUKI PHILOSOPHY: LESSONS AND REMINDERS FROM MICHELE HIGA GEORGE—by ASA Past-President, Deena Reedy

At the end of September, the Music and Dance Academy in Tucson was given the opportunity to offer a one-day workshop for teachers, parents and students featuring world-renowned Suzuki educator, Michele Higa George. A teacher trainer for the Suzuki Association of the Americas, Ms. George served as the director of Suzuki Studies at the Cleveland Institute of Music for sixteen years. She is currently helping to develop two Suzuki programs in Africa (in Tanzania and Zimbabwe) and has recently assumed the post of Outreach Coordinator of the Hartt School Suzuki program. On September 28th, 2008, she shared her experiences from the beginning of becoming a Suzuki teacher and studies in Japan with Dr. Suzuki, to her work as a Suzuki teacher combined with the journey to becoming a parent of a Suzuki student. In fact, her work now focuses a great deal on the education of par-

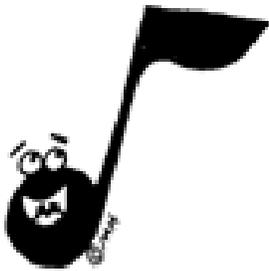
ents and helping them to understand how they can best assist and support their child in the learning process. The afternoon workshop provided many reminders about what the Suzuki approach is intended to accomplish and what it can mean for a student not only in their musical life but mostly in their life in general.

In the teacher session, Ms. George covered topics of interest to those in attendance, which included helping parents understand the benefits of a regular practice schedule (i.e. learning life skills, organizational skills, prioritizing skills) and how they naturally relate to the rest of a child's life. Also discussed was helping parents build a habit - a structure/ a way to learn - which simply becomes a habit. "Practicing and progress is addictive!" In addition, Ms. George highlighted how students can be socially motivated, as well, by joining in group activities.

Although Suzuki teachers are indoctrinated with all of the benefits that a group class instills, selling another activity to busy parents can sometimes be a challenge. However, Ms. George's reminder that the Suzuki philosophy mandates that half the work is done in an individual lesson and half is done in a group lesson was a wonderful shot in the arm to teachers to keep advocating for group classes no matter how busy schedules seem to be. As Suzuki enthusiasts, we understand that at the core of the Suzuki philosophy is the "mother tongue" approach to learning, (i.e. learning language through listening to speech is akin to learning music through listening to music), however, working in a group class setting to bolster student motivation is an equally important hallmark of the Suzuki approach to learning.

Living in a very competitive world, Ms. George (continued on page 2)

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caution us that competitiveness should not enter into our learning environment, which it sometimes can tend to do in a group setting. At the Preucil School, Ms. George reported that parents were banned from asking what piece or book a student was in, because it created an atmosphere of competitiveness that is not the point of a Suzuki lesson. The Suzuki philosophy has at its core the belief in the ability of all children to learn, allowing each child the freedom to learn at their own pace.

Parents were also treated to an inspiring session, which focused on how they could support their child through the Suzuki learning process. Certainly one of the most difficult parts of learning a musical instrument can be getting the student to initially buy-in to the process. When starting music lessons, one may dream about immediately being able to play a song. However, this rarely happens right away - there is a foundation to be built and there are many steps to be mastered before an entire song is even a pos-

sibility. For very young children that begin this process as Suzuki students, we must not think of this process as a race. Ms. George reminded us all that whatever goes in at the beginning of learning is the strongest - so, "GO SLOW at the beginning, that's the time you have time to go slow".

Ms. George related two examples about student progress - one to students that were in the room and one to parents. To the students, she discussed the development of their own speech, saying, "I bet your parents never thought, 'we've already done this 500 times, maybe it's too hard'" - or they won't be able to learn to speak. To parents, Ms. George related her own experience with her daughter. She said she never compared her own child to others, giving the example that she never thought of her daughter - "maybe she'll never know how to crawl forward, so maybe I should put her in a wagon". She just believed that she *would* learn to crawl forward, as we are asked to believe in the Suzuki approach to

learning that students will learn to play their instrument of choice. The point, of course, is that these seem like ridiculous examples, and yet, there are some parents who might have these thoughts in relation to music, due to their own unsuccessful experiences with lessons as a child or meeting resistance in their own children. However, Ms. George assured the parents present about their children that "when they're ready, they will learn - they're not going to learn when you're ready." Ms. George also related that "I've had parents give up or decide it's too hard for their family, but I've never had a student not be able to learn to play the violin."

For me, the most electrifying point of the workshop was hearing Michele George relate her experience of living in Japan for two years and witnessing the inspiring teaching of Dr. Suzuki first-hand. Anytime I've heard anyone who has had direct contact speak of this experience, one of the first things they mention is that it was truly inspiring. Ms. George (continued on page 5)



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News From Around the State

**The Music & Dance Academy**, celebrating its 14th Anniversary in 2009, provides comprehensive music education for all ages, fostering ability in each student and inspiring a learning community that embraces diversity. The Academy uses innovative teaching methods in strings, guitar, woodwinds, brass, percussion, piano, voice and dance. Academy students perform throughout the year in public recitals and Gala Concerts.

Each season the Academy offers the community workshops featuring nationally and internationally renowned artists and leading Master Teachers, Magic Rug Concerts, engaging and interactive musical concerts for families and children, and a Faculty Artist Concert Series. Committed to excellence in teaching, the Music & Dance Academy is a member of the Suzuki Association of the Americas and the National Guild of Community Schools of the Arts.

**Summer Institutes:**

Please check the Website [www.suzukiassociation.org](http://www.suzukiassociation.org) to find dates and locations of Summer Institutes. This experience can't be beat for bonding a family in the joy of playing instruments.

ASA 2008 Fall Festival

On October 18, 2008, ASA remembered Dr. Suzuki's 110th Birthday with a Workshop and Celebration Performance at Orangewood Church in Phoenix. About 100 students and parents commemorated the occasion by polishing pieces, making origami cranes and pin-wheels, watching a video about the life and work of Dr. Suzuki, and performing in a Celebration Performance. Two students won \$100 toward music lessons at a drawing at the end of the celebration.

**We are currently planning next year's Fall Festival. If you would like to help in the planning, please email Mary at [marywilkening@cox.net](mailto:marywilkening@cox.net).**

**The PLACe Music Academy**, 3101 W Peoria Ave, in Phoenix has an active Suzuki program. Teacher Lia Taylor writes:

On December 13, 2008, about 20 violins played Christmas Carols and Suzuki songs at Starbucks in Glendale. During the fall Lia's students have been attending weekly group lessons where several students played Book Recitals.

You can contact Lia at 602-678-5850 or [millerlia@hotmail.com](mailto:millerlia@hotmail.com).

Mary Wilkening also teaches cello at the PLACe Academy, and at her home studio in Litchfield Park. One of her students, Sophie Welsh, recently participated in the Phoenix Youth Symphony Competition and performed in a solo recital in Anthem. You can contact Mary at 623-935-5313 or [marywilkening@cox.net](mailto:marywilkening@cox.net).



**Valley of the Sun Suzuki Association (VSSA)**

held its Fall Book Promotion Recital on November 22. Over 50 students performed in solos and in groups. VSSA will hold its Annual Spring Workshop on Saturday, April 18. For the location and more information contact Kristine Ehlis 480-703-0452 [kristinee@cox.net](mailto:kristinee@cox.net)

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related that Dr. Suzuki trusted children to do what was right. He knew they knew what was right, but just weren't motivated to do it. She shared an observation of a group of problematic students, where Dr. Suzuki had the most problematic student come up to the front and be the teacher. All students had to mimic him, and it was apparently amazing how quickly this student fixed his own problems by seeing them in others.

Naturally, a great deal of time was devoted to practice motivation. It's one constant that all students, parents and teachers must deal with at some point or another. Ms. George pointed out to parents that making music is work. Nobody achieves success as a musician without hours in the practice room (sometimes accompanied by hours of tears, frustration, etc.). In fact, achievement in any field takes hours and hours of hard work. Michele George also shared the following reminders/ pearls of wisdom/ advice for parents (and teachers) on practicing and motivation:

- 1) Just like brushing teeth or homework, anything you have to do every day in a routine becomes boring, but young children thrive on repetition and the familiar.
- 2) The concept of boredom is an adult concept - if children pick up on this from parents or teachers, they will become bored/ try to please you.
- 3) The simpler the task is, the more clear it becomes - so, get your expectations out of the picture - let children progress at the rate they're comfortable.
- 4) Kids can take small disappointments if they know that you believe in them; if you protect them from these disappointments, then any small disappointment is a big deal for them.
- 5) Re-examine your motivation, then know it has to transfer to them as early as possible - you're still involved, but not the driving force.
- 6) Create a community of learning - surround your children and yourself with people and friends that think like you do.
- 7) Know that music learning transfers to all other learning.
- 8) The more you make practicing a habit, the better off you will be.
- 9) The practice doesn't have to be perfect or long if you practice every day.
- 10) Practice time should equal the length of the lesson every day; however, if you're practicing every day, then only practicing 10 min. on one day is not a big deal.
- 11) Practice sessions should replicate what the student did in their lesson.
- 12) Group lessons are the peer group for your students - it will take some of the pressure off you.
- 13) MELTDOWNS- Conflict has already created enough punishment for both of you - no further punishment is needed.
- 14) Videotaping lessons - this will help make students autonomous and will help alleviate arguments in home practice sessions.

## Group Lessons Forming

Cindy Baker is holding Group Lessons at Orangewood Church, 7321 N 10th Street in Phoenix on the following Saturdays: February 7, 28, March 14, 28, April 4, 18, May 2, 16. Contact Cindy at 602-993-9869 or by email at [clbqsmde@earthlink.net](mailto:clbqsmde@earthlink.net) if you are interested in these classes. The price is \$40/ student or \$60/ family.



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