



# Arizona Suzuki Association

## Winter 2014

### Newsletter

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## What Makes a "Successful Suzuki Family"? An Interview with Elise Whyte by Mary Wilkening, Past ASA President

*I am interested in what makes a "Successful Suzuki Family" meaning a family that embodies Dr. Suzuki's mantra of fostering a "beautiful heart" in the children while achieving a high degree of competence on an instrument. Harrison Whyte won the Junior ASTA Arizona Solo Competition in 2010. In 2013, he was All-State Concertmaster and winner of the Symphony of the Southwest Concerto Contest. Cameron was the top cello contestant in the 2014 Phoenix Youth Symphony Concerto Competition. Cameron has been my cello student since he was four. Three of the four Whyte children have the added challenge of Type 1 diabetes. I interviewed Elise Whyte about how she and her husband, Scott, have guided their children through their formative years.*

Whyte Family:

Elise and Scott—parents

Harrison – 17 (Violin, Viola, Mandolin, Guitar, Piano)

Cameron – 15 (Cello, Trombone, Bass Guitar)

Davis – 13 (Violin, Viola, Trumpet, Piano, Handbells, Choir)

Charlotte – 10 (Violin, Handbells, Choir)

*1. What interested you in starting your children in Suzuki instruments? How old were they when they began lessons.*

Both Scott and I were raised in homes that appreciated and loved music, and we knew that we wanted to pass that love of music to our children. When my oldest child was 18 months old and singing on pitch, I knew he had a great ear and already was internalizing what he was hearing. When he turned 2, I wanted to find something that would develop and

move him into "real" music lessons eventually. I quickly found the Suzuki strings method, and began to try to find a teacher. That proved more difficult than I expected, but I finally found a violin teacher when he was almost three. She wisely suggested that his younger brother try a different instrument to minimize sibling competition, so we found a cello teacher when the second child was four. We waited until the summer before kindergarten to start the third child, and started the fourth when she was 4. The differing age starts were partly due to child temperament and readiness and partly due to my ability to logistically practice with that many kids!

*2. What family habits have you established to help your children succeed in music? What other activities do your children have?*

The road has not always been smooth! The kids have always known that music was going to be part of their activities, so even in the most frustrating valleys of their musical journeys, quitting hasn't been an option. We stressed that music is a gift they have been given, and we have asked them to give it back to others for the glory of God. Our other goal has been to help develop their own love for music that they would carry on long term into adulthood. We have offered short sabbaticals at times, but I don't remember one acceptance of the offer!

We have tried many different approaches to practice, some more successfully than others. Each kid has gone through ups and downs of "wanting" to practice or not, so we have had to adapt how much we "push" practice time. We would

allow reduced practice times and occurrences for short periods to give the kids a break and let them rejuvenate. I think flexibility in our expectations has been key to keeping them engaged during down times and helping them really move forward during up times. One time, we rewarded the children monetarily for practicing every day and a few other times we rewarded practice with special treats such as movies or dinners. When the kids DO practice every day, they are able to really see the musical result, so it has been a double benefit every time. Also, we have had to realize that each child is very different, and they respond differently to how hard we "push". Music has been very integral to helping us learn how to parent each child. We have really tried to use the "funnel" approach to practice and schoolwork – when they were young, it was very parent-driven and directed; as they aged, we gave them more and more responsibility over timing and content, and ultimately, outcome.

In third or fourth grade, each child auditioned for the Metropolitan Youth Symphony, which was a HUGE boost for sightreading skills. Since they had to practice for each chair audition, their progress through the Suzuki repertoire slowed, but the value of adding orchestral playing at a young age (the experience AND the repertoire) has been incredible. It has been a challenge and character builder for all of them – we have had tears of frustration, embarrassment at being poorly prepared, life lessons about those who are overly competitive, and ultimately the joy and reward of being first chair.

Our kids have all played sports

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(Soccer, Baseball, Dance, Cross Country), been active at church, participated in Cub and Boy Scouts, and picked up additional instruments, so our days are busy, but practice of their primary string instrument is always “on the menu”, even if it’s a short one. Our instruments always go on vacation with us, so we get extra practice in hotel rooms (and hopefully entertain other guests!).

3. *How do you incorporate practice and listening into your daily routine. How about attending concerts?*

Since my kids are so active, we do a lot listening in the car. My 6 CD changer has been full of Suzuki CDs for as long as I can remember (can be a bit awkward if we are driving other adults!). We have always listened to classical music at home and in the car, as well, so the kids became familiar with much repertoire very early. For a time, we had season tickets to the Phoenix Symphony, and they offered free tickets to children of ticket holders, so we would take the older boys (who invariably fell asleep), but they loved getting to see professional orchestras and hear live music that they knew. As the kids got older, they WANTED to load their iPods with Suzuki repertoire and other classical music, which was incredibly rewarding to us!

4. *What performance opportunities have your children had.*

Since they started playing at a young age, they have all had the opportunity to perform in recitals with their teachers. In addition, they have performed for their classmates at school in “show & tell” settings, for family in impromptu family recitals, for institute recitals and concerts, for Master Class teachers, for school concerts and events, for school talent shows and variety shows, in school pit orchestras to support choral and drama productions, as part of their church orchestra, for MYS and YSSW concerts, as part of MYS Fiddlers and Quartets, for AZ High School Regional and All State concerts, for competition award ceremonies, for church supported recitals, and as an added bonus, they are now starting to get PAID (yeah!) to perform at weddings, in theater pit orchestras, in the church praise band, and in the church oratorio chamber orchestra. They have branched out into a variety of music genres, as well, including fiddling, folk music, pop, and rock.

5. *How have you incorporated Suzuki Institutes in your lives? How about other*

*kinds of music camps?*

Institutes have been WONDERFUL! They are a huge sling shot over the summer to move kids ahead in their abilities. They reinforce what kids have learned and worked on with their teacher (“Oh, someone ELSE thinks I should fix my bow hold?”), solidify repertoire, add new skills to develop, and give the kids an opportunity to see inspirational performances from both professionals and other kids.

Some of my kids have enjoyed the MYS Summer Camp, which allowed them to get ready for their first audition or develop a second instrument. The older ones have also participated in numerous summer quartet camps, which develop chamber music, orchestral, and choral skills. My oldest son considers these camps his all time favorite endeavor.

6. *How has the added challenge of diabetes affected your children's musical pursuits?*

When the two younger boys were first diagnosed, we took a few weeks off. While it adds a whole new set of activities into our routine, the kids have taken it into stride, and we have tried as best as possible to proceed as normal. Periodically, we have had blood sugar numbers, and correcting those takes precedence over everything, including music and schoolwork. Recently, our second son had a cello recital, and his numbers were terrible about an hour before the performance. We had done what we needed to do medically, and just needed to wait for the result. Unfortunately, when it was his turn to perform he still felt awful, but he powered through and performed reasonably well. It wasn’t his best performance, but he knows that his health is more important than his offering of music, so he had peace about it. The disease has helped our whole family put much of life into perspective, but it has definitely added a large layer of complexity into everything we do.

7. *What else you would like to add?*

I just want to reiterate that we have been imperfect along the way, and that our children have had hills and valleys of progression. BUT, watching them slowly accept the music as THEIRS as they enter their teen years has given us a huge sense of fulfillment. Whether they pursue music professionally remains to be seen, but we know that they have developed an ever-growing love for making and listening to music, which is all we could hope for!

## Every Child Can!

ASA hosted the Every Child Can! (ECC) course which is sponsored by SAA. The course was taught by Teacher Trainer, Dr. Louise Scott, from NAU. The class took place in Phoenix on January 19, 2014 and was full, with 30 participants. Participants included teachers, parents, and those interested in learning more about the Suzuki Method. Participants came from Phoenix, Prescott, Tucson, and from out-of state, including California, Colorado, Indiana, New York, and Texas. This introductory course covers Suzuki’s philosophy and serves as the first course for those interested in becoming registered Suzuki teachers.



## Advertisement

## CHANDLER SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS

## Music Reading and Ensemble Classes

Summer Semester 2014 (April 28 – August 7)

[www.beautifulmusic.info](http://www.beautifulmusic.info)

FIFTEEN weeks of intensive study in music reading, interpretation and harmonization for elementary through high school string students.

This summer semester will also prepare and launch several new dedicated string performance groups! These groups will become well-known throughout the greater Phoenix area as they practice weekly and perform together as recognized groups through the rest of their elementary – 12<sup>th</sup> grade school years.

Launching the next CFA string quartet that will play together for the next 5 – 7 years for many community events, competitions, weddings, school programs, state events, etc.

Launching a new CFA elementary string trio (violin, cello, piano) that will perform together after they get a good starter program well-rehearsed and ready to perform during the summer semester. This group will be performing in various community venues: assisted living homes, hospitals, stores, competitions, etc.

Launching a new CFA violin quartet. Classical repertoire ready to travel to perform by the end of summer semester.

NEW!!! Suzuki String Chorale! ...Will include beginner strings from 3 yrs. Old to upper level book students. This group will be performance ready BY FALL SEMESTER 2014, to play 3 and 4 part harmonies of selections from the Suzuki repertoire through book 6 level.

For more information or to register for summer classes

CONTACT Chandler School of Fine Arts: (480)245-7922 or [cjelic.cfa@gmail.com](mailto:cjelic.cfa@gmail.com)

## SCENES FROM SUMMER 2013 NOTE READING AND ENSEMBLE CLASSES



## News From Around the State

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

VSSA Workshop 2014!

SAVE THE DAY, Saturday, March 1, 2014 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

#### Suzuki Meets Snoopy!

Plan on attending VSSA's annual winter workshop. Join us in welcoming our guest clinicians for a day of fun and learning. The winter workshop helps provide a little break from your everyday routine and you get to spend the day with other Suzuki families. It's a great time for parents to network about practice tips and for the students to see others Suzuki students in action!

A group class, a master class, an ensemble or movement class, and an art class are included in the days events. Lunch and a snack are also included.

Make sure you reserve the day from 8:30-3:30. Registration forms will be posted on the VSSA website [www.valleysuzuki.org](http://www.valleysuzuki.org) by February 2, 2014.

Any questions? Contact Kristine Ehlis, [Kristinee@cox.net](mailto:Kristinee@cox.net), (email is the quickest way to get an answer to your questions) or call me at 480-730-0452.



### ASA—Phoenix Piano Group Upcoming Events:

Piano Basics Workshop with Ogiwara Sensei and Kawamura Sensei from Japan, Feb. 6-10, AZ Piano

Friendship Concert, Feb. 9, 2:30, Cutler-Plotkin Jewish Heritage Center

Celebration Concerts, March 1, Katzin Hall, ASU

Graduation Auditions, April 12, place TBA

Graduation, April 26, My First Piano



## Summer Music Camps

### 2014 Curry Summer Music Camp at NAU

[www.cal.nau.edu/camp/](http://www.cal.nau.edu/camp/)

Senior Camp (9th—12th Grade)

June 22—July 5

Junior Camp (7th-9th Grade)

July 6—12

For more information go to

[www.cal.nau.edu/camp](http://www.cal.nau.edu/camp)

Facebook: Curry Summer Music Camp at NAU

### Summer Institutes:

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

### Chaparral MusicFest Suzuki Academy

Join us this June 11-14, 2014 in beautiful Prescott, Arizona for this small, intimate, and affordable Suzuki Institute. The **Chaparral MusicFest Suzuki Academy** is a four day session is designed to fill a need within the Arizona region for a Suzuki style camp that will further enrich and inspire our students. The Suzuki Academy is open piano and violin students in Books 1-3. Core classes include Master Class, Repertoire and Group Classes and Musicianship and Theory. Enrichment classes include Fiddle, Student Duets for Violin and Piano, Composition and Music Reading. Space is limited and typically filled with repeat attendees, so early registration is recommended.

Please visit [chaparralmusicfest.org](http://chaparralmusicfest.org) for more info, Brochure and Registration Form.



## 2013 ASA Fall Workshop

ASA hosted the Fall Workshop, on Friday, October 19<sup>th</sup> and Saturday, 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013, at Orangewood Presbyterian Church in Phoenix. On Friday evening, advanced students played in master classes for violin clinician, Susan Baer, and cello clinician, Julie Newton while other advanced students and teachers observed.

On Saturday, Susan Baer worked with all levels of violinists on Suzuki repertoire, and with advanced students on Shostakovich “Gavotte”. Julie Newton challenged all cellists to play with “Hobbit” fingers and “shark arms”, and led advanced cellists in the “Cello Baby Boogie”. Connie Jharmarkt guided advanced string players in chamber music.



Violin students perform at the Final Concert.



Julie Newton and cellists prepare to perform “Cello Boogie Blues”, complete with sunglasses!

The students also participated in master classes and group classes with Arizona teachers including Louise Scott, violin professor at NAU, and learned Irish Dancing and Irish Fiddling from Kari Barton.



Kari Barton leads Irish Fiddling for violins and cellos.



Susan Baer, Connie Jahmarkt, and the advanced violin group practice Shostakovich “Gavotte”.



ASA

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**See the Arizona Suzuki Association  
Membership Directory Inside!**