



## Suzuki Association of Colorado E-Newsletter

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### A Suzuki Piano Experience in England

In late summer, I was catching up on reading some professional journals and was impressed by an article about Suzuki piano teaching by an author from Cambridge, UK. In the article in American Suzuki Journal - Spring 2010, "Tips for Parents for Successful Practicing with Children", Jenny Macmillan discusses the challenges and rewards of a parent/child team learning the art of their instrument. From personal experience she suggests strategies to make the music learning even more successful and enjoyable. Because praise is a very valuable tool, she challenges parents to reinforce the positive parts of a child's practice with affirming words and validate their efforts. This journal article further suggests looking at other articles on her website, [www.jennymacmillan.co.uk](http://www.jennymacmillan.co.uk) for more information. Here I found more practical writings about Suzuki teaching and applications for the teacher and parent. I contacted Mrs. Macmillan (a Suzuki teacher-trainer in Europe) who answered some questions, and further invited me to observe some lessons in her studio.

The Suzuki students of Cambridge were quite similar to those in studios of Colorado. Beginning with the friendly bow, the lessons incorporated technique, reading, review and the most recent Suzuki study piece. The parents were trained to take notes (as well as perform the given literature). They had also taken lessons in advance of their children starting. Students' lessons were between fifteen and sixty minutes long depending on the age and level of the student, and still seemed too short.

Group classes involved four to six students of similar age and musical experience. They played games that challenged the ear and memory as well as prepared them for future music reading.

In all the activities, it seemed that the parents were a key to success as they followed every note from the lesson and insured that their child was practicing at home in the manner suggested.

Students are encouraged to play a second instrument, and form ensembles as they progress through their reading levels. A highlight of the week was hearing three of the pianists play in a teen string trio, performing with much gusto, a Beethoven trio.

At the end of the week, it was a privilege to meet with several other Suzuki trainees from Scotland and Bulgaria. They were eager to implement the parent training ideas for their students' families as well as develop their students' musicality.

I obtained from Jenny Macmillan her most thorough of writings for teachers - her unpublished "Notebook for Suzuki Piano Teachers", in which she details every piece in the Suzuki Books 1 - 4 repertoire. She lists the challenges, the review, and how to execute the artistic values of every piece along with other points of interest. She discusses listening, practicing, theory, praising, demonstrating, motivating, parent training, performing and a host of other pertinent musical items.

Another subsequent handbook that should be mandatory for all students, parents and music teachers is her newly published "Successful Practising". It addresses the whole subject of practice in music. Macmillan discusses the involvement of parents, teaching teachers about assignments and expectations, etc, as well as the student dealing with special issues of learning new techniques, reading, repertoire, performing and more are thoroughly detailed in the 14 chapters of the handbook.

Though unknown on this side of the Atlantic, these two handbooks must be made available in the States, especially in Suzuki Teacher groups. Successful Practising: A handbook for pupils, parents and teachers, is available directly from [www.jennymacmillan.co.uk](http://www.jennymacmillan.co.uk)

Carol Jilling