

Training as a Suzuki *teacher*



Gill Gordon

by Gill Gordon

In 2003, having been out of piano teaching for 17 years, I decided to return to teaching and, on the recommendation of a friend from college days, contacted the British Suzuki Institute to undertake what I thought of at the time as a “refresher course”. Nearly four years later, I’m still studying!

My only previous awareness of Suzuki’s approach was a documentary in the seventies, showing hundreds of young violinists in a football stadium, playing the *Twinkle variations* through to a concerto. It was very moving, but I dismissed it as irrelevant to me as a pianist.

From the BSI website I discovered that I had to prepare a Mozart sonata movement plus a piece of my own choice for audition. There was also some recommended reading and an instruction to have memorised the first repertoire book before the first course, which I dutifully did. It seemed quite a lot of preparation for a “refresher”. Thus commenced a personal journey which has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

That first course was totally puzzling – emphasising a very different technique from that learnt years ago. There was a strong focus on variations on *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*, and on listening to the tone. It seemed very intense, and it was!

It is the most comprehensive piano teacher training programme I have come across, encompassing an in-depth study of piano technique, how to teach it to very young students, incorporating Suzuki’s personal philosophy into one’s approach to teaching, understanding child development in those crucial years, educating parents and learning how to include them in the child’s learning process. We observe the teaching of experienced Suzuki teachers and teach children under the supervision of a teacher trainer. We also practise teaching one another and teaching our teachers.

Suzuki believed that every child can learn to play, not just those with a special talent, and that, with the right approach, every child would develop the required ability to reach a high level of achievement. My experience to date has proved him correct every time.

An interesting discovery has been that what Suzuki developed was not a “method”, but a set of principles of learning, which can be applied to anything. I am also a horn player and there is, as yet, no Suzuki brass. So I have embarked, with the help of some willing children and parents,

on the process of developing an approach for brass “in the style of” Suzuki.

Furthermore, I have noticed, particularly in the last two years, that everything I do as a teacher is now rooted in Suzuki’s philosophy. My experience of teaching in this way has given me a new joy in working with children and realised for me the concept of teaching being a Work of Heart. ♥

■ Gill Gordon studied at the Guildhall School 1969-1973 with Bridget Wild (Arrau’s teaching representative in the UK).

One of the most rewarding experiences of my life

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