

# Getting together at *workshops* by Lavinia Ferguson



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If you walk into a Suzuki workshop at any time you are instantly surrounded by the sounds of children singing, practising, playing in groups and performing in concerts. For young pianists coming to a workshop for the first time it is exciting to hear older children playing so well. There may be violins, violas, cellos, orchestras and choirs. Just for those few days they experience what it must be like to go to a specialist music school with all the stimulation of so many musicians living and working together. During the course they will have daily piano lessons in a small

masterclass, together with a variety of other classes such as musicianship, singing, movement, and ensemble. There will be concerts every day, often for faculty as well as students, and everyone will have an opportunity to perform.

At a workshop, all the teaching is in groups. But unlike 'group method' teaching, where all the basic skills of the instrument are taught, Suzuki group classes are an extension of the work done in individual lessons. We know how well children learn when they are having fun, and how much they can learn from each other. The social interaction is particularly valuable for piano pupils who may not normally meet and play with other musicians like them. The purpose is for children to enjoy playing and learning together, to get used to performing in an informal setting, and to be inspired and motivated to work hard and to raise their standards.

Typical musicianship classes at a Suzuki workshop will include work on theory and reading as well as a good deal of ensemble playing. The common repertoire is an excellent teaching resource. Whatever stage the pupils have reached, the teacher can dip into earlier pieces to demonstrate. So theory is taught from a starting point of what the children already know from their own listening and playing.

A workshop can be as short as half a day or as long as a week. Some are small and intimate, others have several hundred students. If children are lucky enough to attend a residential course they may have opportunities for handbell ringing, sport, art and drama alongside their musical

activities. Some courses provide time off to enable families to go to the beach. There are new friends to be made and all the fun of boarding school without the exams.

Of course, since it is a Suzuki workshop, the younger children will be accompanied by their parents. It is fundamental to the Suzuki approach that parents are very much involved in the musical development of their children.

They are expected to take a close interest so they can be helpful and encouraging.

But parents sometimes need inspiration too. No-one can say that practising with

children is always easy and it can be useful to have input from other parents and teachers.

Invariably children and parents come away from a workshop refreshed and full of new enthusiasm. The children have obviously progressed after their intensive work, and their parents are more relaxed having had a chance to share stories and problems with others over a glass of wine in the bar. For teachers, it has been a welcome opportunity to meet colleagues and share ideas; for new teachers in training, the workshop has provided a wide range of lessons for observation. It has been a time for social and musical interaction for everyone, and a time for widening horizons.

At the top of the scale are the huge international workshops, such as in Turin last Easter, where teachers, parents and children from all over the world gather to play together and to celebrate their achievements. How wonderful

it is to be able to participate in such a gathering where, with no special preparation, children can learn and make music together from Day One simply because of the way

they have been taught. What better demonstration of Dr Suzuki's vision of a world in which people, brought up to love music, live together in peace and harmony!

Most Suzuki workshops are open to observers. Anyone interested should visit the BSI website at [www.britishsuzuki.com](http://www.britishsuzuki.com).

■ Lavinia Ferguson studied music at Bristol University and has been teaching Suzuki piano in Bristol since 1984.

## Children learn well when they are having fun

## A time for social and musical interaction