



**Comune di Castelnuovo Magra**

(Provincia della Spezia)

Membro della Presidenza del

Coordinamento Nazionale Enti Locali per la Pace e i Diritti Umani

# **‘EVERY CHILD CAN’**

**Homage to Dr. Shiniki Suzuki**

By

**Elio Galvagno**

On the occasion of awarding  
**the ‘PEACE-MAKER’ prize**  
to Doctor Shiniki Suzuki (1898-1998)

**Castelnuovo Magra (SP)**

7 March, 2008

## Acknowledgement

Before beginning my speech, I wish to thank all of those who contributed to preparing this event for their splendid work.

Thankyou comes also from the world of Suzuki and in particular from the International Suzuki Association representing teachers in all continents, and in particular from the President of the European Suzuki Association, Haukur Hannesson, and the President of the Italian Suzuki Institute, Fiorenza Rosi. It is a great joy to have Dr Suzuki's humanitarian efforts, those most dear to him, recognized. We view your choice, after past ones, as a desire to take the seeds tossed by Dr Suzuki as a sign, a lighthouse, a point of reference for all of those intending to set along the path of constructing peace and justice.

## Dr Suzuki's Intent

The intent and constant endeavour of Dr Suzuki during his entire life (dying a centenarian in 1998,) were always anchored in these five elements:

- Children (do something for children)
- Music (the way in which he was able to contribute)
- The character and heart of children (encouraging harmonious development)
- Future citizens (grow good citizens)
- Peace (create peace-makers in the world)

The concept of educating children through music was developed by Dr Suzuki as an alternative to the disasters of the world wars, the second of which he was a direct testimony. He intended, in fact, to contribute to the development of a new humanity to preclude similar horrors. He wanted to begin with very small children and, being a musician, through music - believing strongly in its spirit to transform - perceived he could develop and encourage the values of sensitiveness, courtesy, communication, appreciation of beauty, humility, patience, and perseverance. Values acquirable thanks to the development of a musical talent that every one of us has, whether small or great. The musical results were and are extraordinary though, without being self-contradictory, not his primary goal. There exists, he said, a fair amount of great musicians, but not enough great people.

What springs to mind at this point is an observation: Parents come nearer to Suzuki's experience because their children learn to play a musical instrument; and also a question: What does all this have to do with personal growth? How does music really play a part in this process? I think to respond to this question I need to digress, albeit briefly, returning to the origins of the Suzuki method. In fact Dr Suzuki had a clear outlook: It was not essential to become a music professional, sufficing only to play well an instrument. In so doing the child was coinvolved in the learning process, defining and overcoming small objectives (step after step) that over time always would become more substantial. To absorb at the highest level, from the most tender age the expressive properties of music by the great composers was to begin modelling character, associating the full force of the musical spirit with the vital force in every one of us. The ability to resolve problems was considered fundamental to confronting and overcoming difficulties in daily life, not only once becoming adults, but more importantly during infancy and adolescence. Reasoning in this way already provides us with a means of comprehending: Begin very early with music and direct attention toward the child, without aiming to create a music professional. At this point its necessary to know how his perception was born in order to thoroughly understand its scope.

## His Method

On this occasion I am unable to trace the Suzuki method's historical roots. Suffice to say the theories of learning of educators and musicians like the Czechoslovakian Comenius (1600) France's J.J. Rousseau (1712) the Swiss Pestalozzi (1746) the German F. Frobel (1771) America's L. Mason (1800) as well as Dalcroze, Kodaly, Orff and Montessori all had a significant influence. Instead we'll briefly consider his life story.

We are in the first 20'. Suzuki was in Germany because he wanted to learn to play the violin, after having fled Japan to avoid becoming an administrator in his father's factory. He remained for about ten years, from 1922 to 1929, a guest of A. Einsein with whom he played also in a quartet. After about two years' stay he became aware that all of the German children little more than a year old could correctly speak German, and he not. A normal person would not see this as a great problem; a genius would. He decided therefore to find an answer to the problem.

He began to reflect about the mechanisms of acquiring language, isolating these three aspects:

- **A long period of listening** beginning in the mother's arms. It went on for at least five or six months after birth, and was preparation for the first gurgles and attempts at speech.
- **A favourable environment** surrounding the child. Whatever gurgle or attempted word was uttered, however bad, it was greeted with delight, joy, and the request for it to be repeated to all and sundry, whether or not the sound was perhaps only recognisable to the mother or father. In this context no-one thought to say to the child to keep quiet and retry only when they were more able, trusting implicitly in the child's ability to learn to speak. No doubt about it was entertained; such as, "... we'll try Italian for a few months and if that doesn't work we'll move on to Spanish...".
- **Repetition:** When the child had learned to say 'Mamma' the word was not put aside to learn another but was solicited repeatedly throughout the child's life, in all manner of ways and in unending contexts.

Dr Suzuki, who had not this conditioning and could do nothing to remediate the situation, was literally captured by this idea: These three conditions could be applied to music. They could become the pillars of a new musical education program based on the mother tongue method. In 19...?? he returned to Japan and, whilst still continuing to play, put on hold his concert career to dedicate himself heart and soul to pursuing this idea: Learning to play in the same way as speech is acquired. He prepared a music list suitable for very small children to hear daily, explained to parents how to create the most favourable learning environment, and taught the parents to play musically with their children and incorporate in a natural way the repetition of skills acquired. WWII stopped his efforts, and he risked death from a serious illness. After the war, with a very clear idea of his objective as mentioned, he felt compelled to begin his new adventure without delay. From this time (we're now in about 1955,) he travelled endlessly almost up until the year of his death to preach what he believed, instructing thousands of teachers all over the world, spreading his method everywhere.

Perhaps now the hypothetical parent interested in our proposition begins to understand that it is not a place simply to park their child but, rather, they have a precise role to fulfil. That is, to play along with their child and to share with them the educative process, where character development is at the core, and where to play an instrument is the means of encouraging the fully-rounded growth of the whole child.

## Developing Ability

For Dr Suzuki, the fully-rounded growth of the child occurs by means of developing certain abilities. To be brief, I shall only list them:

- The ability to listen (listening to music facilitates the acquisition of information and knowledge)
- The ability to observe and imitate (children learn music in the same way that they learn to speak)
- The ability to memorise (like with speaking before reading, so it is with first playing and then reading that enormously develops memory)
- The ability to concentrate (perhaps its superfluous to stress the importance of this ability)
- The ability to perform in public (to become sufficiently confident to share what one knows)
- The ability to persevere (step after step, learning to overcome difficulties and discovering oneself capable of building success)
- The ability of self-discipline. Here I would like to describe a chain of consequences regarding discipline:
  - The parent creates the desire to learn so the child willingly complies;
  - When a child wants to play, they play more and more til it becomes habitual;
  - When the habit forms, capability increases;
  - When capability increases playing comes more naturally, without being forced;
  - When playing is easy the child finds it pleasurable and is delighted;
  - When a child finds pleasure they begin to value what they are doing;
  - When they understand the value of what they are doing they begin to feel responsible and under a certain obligation. At this point it can be said they become disciplined in the activity.

## Heartfelt Ability

There was another ability that Dr Suzuki held above all others: The heartfelt ability. To think in a whole sense about a person is to think also of their heart. Accordingly, Dr Suzuki asked his pupils to find the heart of the music, or more correctly the heart and soul that beats in the works of Bach or Mozart. It is not sufficient, in fact, to stop and listen to hear if the notes and rhythm are correct. A more profound searching is required. But how is it done? And, more particularly, how can we do it if our hearts are closed and turned inwards? The answer is to practice opening our hearts, to give, to realise who is around us. Only when we orient ourselves towards openness will our minds become more sensitive, and the musical expression in our performances become full and delicate.

Dr Suzuki's more than 70 years of research demonstrates that heartfelt feelings and great talent are profoundly tied. In a chapter of his book *Ability Development from Age Zero - Exceptional talent, exceptional heart*, he describes how to teach generosity. Yes, generosity and love like every ability can be taught and, above all, like every ability, need to be continually practiced. Accordingly, Suzuki requires daily practice of catching the feelings and needs of others, without the help of words. He specifically requires discovery through looking to discover how parents are feeling, if they need help. Little by little, as the ability develops, he requires the helping of parents even before it is requested, as by then it could be too late. The highest step of heartfelt ability comprises doing something at least once a week to help parents without them knowing, and without anyone discovering the do-gooder. Only Suzuki would know their secrets. Developing a sensitiveness toward the feelings of others may later on, perhaps, make it possible to capture Bach and Mozarts' hearts in their music.

I am sure that now you understand completely that the Suzuki method is more than simply a means of learning to play the violin.

## Values

In this context I wish to emphasize three **values** that can make a difference and, thanks to Dr Suzuki, are changing the educational horizons in this world. Also here I am limited to little more than a listing, given time constraints, rather than a complete account of the research and publications on the subject.

- **Begin as early as possible.** I prefer to cite Plato's *Republica* as one of many studies attesting to this precept: "...you know that to begin is the most important part of any work and especially in the case of the young, where character is being formed and ideas quickly become fixed ... Everything received in the mind at that age probably becomes indelible and unalterable ...". In his book *Ability Development from Age Zero* Suzuki states simply and clearly: "You need to begin as young as possible." All subsequent development – physical, mental, emotional and aesthetic – is facilitated and conditioned by the fundamental ties established in the very first lessons.
- **Environment:** Thanks to Suzuki, in these past 60 years there has been a revolution in understanding about the emergence of talent and ability. The whole debate about nature and culture also has been influenced by his practices; it is not possible today to say that this child can and that other cannot. Here too he provides us with a simple assertion to ponder: "Man is the child of their environment. Everything depends on environment. I have no doubt about the fact that people are born with inherited physiological differences, but I believe that a person's abilities grow and develop according to external stimuli."

- **Believe in human spirit and the spirit of music, using a positive approach in all human relations.** One day, after a mediocre performance Suzuki still managed to find something positive to say to his student. What a lesson he provides us! He managed in a critical situation to create an environment of acceptance. In similar situations students knowing they will be accepted feel safe, facilitating an opening up to growth, to betterment and to learning. He didn't say "how clever, what a great performance !" but rather created a situation in which the child was not pushed into being defensive and building walls. Also from Plato: "... you have to start off your children studying in a pleasurable way, without constraints, with the underlying objective to follow the natural inclinations of their particular characters ..."  
We know full well how important for Suzuki is character development in musical education!

### **A vision**

These values lead me to outline **a vision**, one shared by not only a few Japanese teachers but by now millions of teachers spread throughout the world, and sustained increasingly by the academic and scientific worlds. Dr Suzuki outlined this vision in 1968 at the (glass palace of the) United Nations building:

#### **EVERY CHILD CAN!**

If a child, says Suzuki, has learned to speak well, something that requires a high level of ability, how is it possible that they have problems at school, that they remain behind? Something's not right with their education. Turning to the Heads of State he said: "... As a private citizen I can do little, I can only reveal the success of the 'mother tongue' method through the Suzuki Method ... but the way of learning the mother tongue has been defined by scholars as a natural method used by children world-wide in learning to speak ... why don't you educators study at depth the mother tongue method, not only for music education but also in all the other branches of learning? I like to think that this could happen in the 21<sup>st</sup> century!"

Pablo Casals described the role of the educator in this manner: "... to be an educator means to have a great possibility: to help to give form and direction to the life of human beings. What is greater than this? Children are our biggest treasure ... to think of them is to think of the future of the world ... consider the significance of growing their minds ... of helping them form their world view ... of preparing them for work ... I think that no profession is more important than that of the educator..."

To educate means to learn continually. And so the student's capacity to solve problems is constantly enriched and modified by their circumstances, of which we are part. Which words, what tone of voice, what mood serves to catch attention, will guidance or independence be more appropriate? Let's not forget that to educate means literally to bring out.

Furthermore, to educate means to develop empathy. Thus, to be ready to understand the child from their point of view, to be ready to put aside temporarily our world, to be ready to understand without judging and without necessarily agreeing or disagreeing, to be ready to accept the child's feelings without wanting to change them.

## **A vision: Which teacher or educator**

*For a teacher-educator to be so prepared, to have this base-attitude, to be ready to dedicate themselves to the building of the vision 'EVERY CHILD CAN' what competencies and objectives must they have?*

The **first** objective is to create with the student an **environment** of trust, of confidence, of approval, of affection, of safety, of comfort. An environment that inspires, celebrates, helps, and respects. An environment where there is certainty the child will realise their maximum potential. An environment where, day after day, the sound of music spreads within the child, inspiring and motivating. An environment where a parent's love fills the child's heart, making them secure. An environment where the teacher's example enters their spirit, encouraging growth. What power to shape outcomes!

The Japanese psychologist Hatano actually uses the verb 'spread' in place of educate. This is the very essence of natural learning.

The **second** objective is to have **a vision for every child** and to refer to this in every lesson and every encounter if possible. A vision of excellence, ability, trustworthiness, courtesy and balance. The teacher has unlimited faith in every child and, like Michelangelo, sees into their future, imagining them playing, their performances, their talent.

The **third** objective is to **find a way to encourage the development of every child**. In an environment of trust, Suzuki continually reminds us, every child can be educated. It's up to the teacher to find that way. The teacher must develop the ability to appreciate the special qualities of every student, augmenting their capacity to understand, to learn what they need, and finding the way to help them grow.

## A vision: Which child

*At the beginning I said the intent and the endeavours of Dr Suzuki were always anchored in five elements, the first of which was to dedicate oneself to children. When he taught, he always took a moment to reach their level. What was his contribution? Which child would grow with such a teacher in such an environment? Elenco tra le altre tre possibilità.*

In **such an environment** the child will find the conditions to fully express themselves. Personal expression perhaps is the most important reason to make music. In the same way that we insist on finding the exact note we must learn to insist: I want to hear your heart, not your brawn and brain!! “... try to speak in a monotone, on a single note, ... you often do the same thing in music ... now speak in a normal manner and try to do likewise in music; you will understand then that music without expression is little more than organised noise ...”

Think of a concert, an event, or a person that might change your life. Probably you would be hit by the energy, the joy, the sincerity, the expressiveness of that occasion. The teacher Suzuki is a person continually surprised and changed by children, not wholly and solely by their extraordinary playing, but by their behaviour!

In **such an environment** the child **discovers they are unique and not reproducible**, and that their uniqueness is of worth to the community. It might be their way of speaking or laughing that adds to the variety of life or it could be their unique way of seeing or thinking, or their inventiveness or expressiveness. And so, the individuality of a man or a woman could be of incalculable benefit to the entire human race. Pablo Casals attests that “... every second that we live is new and unique in the universe, a moment that never was before and never again will be new ... But what do we teach our children at school? That two plus two make four, and that Paris is the capital of France.

“We must instead also say, do you know who you are? You are a marvel, you are unique in all the world, there is no other child like you ... look at your body, your arms, your legs, your fingers, at how they move. You have the capacity to become any thing, you are a jewel, ... When you grow up you must tell others the same thing, that they are marvels like you ... together we must create a world worthy of our children ...”

In **such an environment** the child **can develop their talents**. This is a fascinating project in continual evolution, an interactive process for our part requiring attention, sensitivity, both analysis and spontaneity, as well as a readiness to modify the objectives and reach accord.

To search out the talents of everyone is to be confronted by the infinite richness of life and the unique treasure that is every living person. The sound and the voice of every being flourishes; as each one of us has a vocal timbre that is unmistakable, so has everyone their own sound. Like friends who recognise a voice without needing to see each other, so do children that grow with music in their hearts recognise with closed eyes who is playing, because each one of us has an unmistakable timbre. What sensitiveness: Great heart, great sound!

To honour, celebrate, and respect talents encourages the teacher themselves to insist so that parents do everything necessary.

## Conclusion

Suzuki puts us on notice to the end about not thinking solely of how to place our fingers on an instrument. He continually reminds us that to teach the notes is a marvellous half, a great arena for building character and heart: "... you think of the child behind the violin; teach the child using the violin ...". A sound, a forgotten note, can become an occasion, an opportunity for teaching values both musical and humane. And so the parent, who sees pursuing musical excellence as a means of also building character and heart in their very child, does not ask the teacher to move to another track, ignoring all of the details still to be addressed.

He knew that we were all educated traditionally, that we could easily turn away, that we could be vulnerable to criticism from colleagues knowing nothing of our voyage. How he might help us, and how necessary he is still today! Today, though, its our turn, and now my turn to remind us.

We are **privileged** teachers because we can stay many years with a child and perceive what they might become. Thanks to the weekly encounter immersed in music **we can** furnish a model and a way of being in life. We begin with tiny steps at home, then in school, then in a club, gradually learning to share the values of which I speak, reaching year by year always a larger number of children. We act locally but we are not alone. Being fully engaged in the pursuit of excellence in each and every student gives us such energy that we are obliged to transmit it and share it with everyone. Suzuki taught us to reach for an ideal: Make a decision and then act on it. I like to cite Goethe in this regard: "... Whatever thing you want to do or dream to do, begin it because in you there is some genius, some power and some magic ..."

This image has a powerful impact on each of us, it encourages us and gives us hope.

We are teachers of so great a movement that we can make a palpable difference in the future of education. We can play our part in the continuation of culture, we can change and influence the course of human evolution in a positive direction. We have inherited from Suzuki a method, a project, and an extraordinary ideal: To teach children to use music as a looking glass for viewing the world, and to develop through it a sense of perception such as to permit truth to be more easily recognized.

The responsibility of this prize is great, but I can assure you I am ready to accept it and to carry it with me. "Perhaps the music of children will save the world" said Casals after having heard for the first time thousands of children play together. This was certainly Suzuki's dream, cultivated for all his life, and so it is for me, and for all who tread the same path.

Do you remember the children that ought to have and still today must recount what they did during the week at the end of a lesson? ... A child one day couldn't wait. Barely they saw Suzuki they ran to him, reached up and whispered in his ear that they had polished their father's shoes without anyone knowing it was them ...

Thankyou!

*P.s. I'd like to thank for their reflections and written essays on American Suzuki Journal the following teachers: W.Starr, R.Cole, V.Vorreiter, A.J.Lewis, B. Schneiderman and C.M. Barret  
Their articles changed my life.*