

## Suzuki Singing – a Finnish Experiment

*This article, written by Tuula-Maria Ahonen, was published in the Finnish magazine Kauppa Ja Koti in November 1987. Translation from Finnish into English by Jyrki, Pietilä and Sharron Beamer.*

### The singing voice of the mother is enjoyed by the baby in the Womb

A group of pregnant mothers have deliberately been singing to their unborn babies since they were six months pregnant. Three months after their delivery the group began meeting again with their babies. They will continue to meet until their children are old enough to decide if they want to continue. This new experiment, which started in Finland, has been approved by the International Suzuki Association.

Päivi Kukkamäki, a professional singer, piano teacher, singing teacher and church organist, also has experience working in kindergartens. 'While teaching in various kindergartens I noticed that children are not being sung to now as much as children were in the past.' From her own background of being sung to at home as a child, Päivi realises how meaningful an experience it is. 'The child gets a feeling of security when mother and father sing to him. The voice is a natural instrument. In comparison, even the piano lacks tonal expressiveness.'

Suzuki teaching first came to Finland in 1976. Päivi says that the basic principle of this teaching is to listen and repeat – the same way you learn your mother tongue. For example, piano Suzuki teaching can be started as young as age three. Päivi

teachers, singers, midwives and the GROWING THROUGH MUSIC group and Model Hanger Co. All the chosen mothers have been willing participants and have been meeting together since May 1987.

### Sensitivity and perseverance are qualities that can be developed

Starting as early as the pre-natal period may make the layman think that an attempt is being made to create musical geniuses. In fact, the Suzuki method is much more than music education. Shinichi Suzuki says in his book, *Nurtured By Love*, 'I just want to make children good citizens. If a child listens to good music from the day he is born and learns to play it himself, his sensitivity, character and perseverance will develop. His heart will become beautiful.' Dr Suzuki also said, 'If the world would cooperate in educating good children there would be no world wars.' Therefore, this method is a question of very basic and important things for mankind. Dr Suzuki's opinion is that to become a better player one must become a better human being.

Päivi says she often re-reads Dr Suzuki's book. 'This book is full of gold nuggets that one keeps on finding.' Like Dr Suzuki, Päivi does not use big words, but



*The first Suzuki singing group*

studied this method last year in Japan and after discussions with Dr and Mrs Suzuki it was decided that Päivi will develop a Suzuki programme for singing in Finland. Päivi decided to begin as soon as the child could hear – at the pre-natal age of six months.

At the Tikurila child health centre, the first five pregnant women were chosen by lottery to take part in this programme. The participants were not selected by any sort of testing because the basic principle of Suzuki teaching is that talent is not inherited, but is developed through learning. In creating this new teaching, Päivi is getting help from kindergarten

expresses ideas with simplicity. 'I think the most important thing in life is loving each other. Humanitarian values should be stressed more in our society.' The Suzuki singing teaching is meant not only for mother and child. Once a month there is a family evening when fathers and other children in the family get together. Päivi says, 'We are nurturing human fellowship.'

### Enthusiasm in the Womb – singing relaxes the baby after birth

During the writing of this article the first 'Suzuki baby' was born. The group met especially for this photograph. This is the



*Mrs Päivi Kukkamäki, singing for Dr Suzuki's 88th birthday with other teacher trainees' string accompaniment*

first baby to attend the meeting outside the womb. The mother, Tarja Vehkasalo, says, 'This is a very peaceful baby'. The baby looks calm in this new place, surrounded by new people. The songs, which the mother sings, are familiar to him. Tarja listened to these songs daily on tape, but she preferred to sing them herself. The baby's father also sang them to Tarja's stomach. When in the womb the baby showed recognition and enthusiasm when the mother sang. When she sang he began to move. Now they have a relaxing effect on him. 'I sing to him at night when I am trying to put him to sleep. It seems to work.' The Father's singing also calms him. 'Singing does not work when breast feeding. He stops sucking and listens'.

Päivi says the group have done an experiment. The mothers make an 'X' whenever the child moves. The babies respond most to Vivaldi's music, Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* and Schubert's *Ave Maria*. Besides children's songs and lullabies they listen to a relaxing tape of classical music. 'To some families classical music was previously unknown. They said they did not realise it could be so nice.'

### The child absorbs music

Päivi tells what happened to some acquaintances of hers. The family went to a concert which the baby slept through, but afterwards only the baby was able to recognise the piece played at the concert. Päivi says children absorb music like they absorb their mother tongue. The Suzuki Method of listening and copying has a greater impact on children than it does on adults. That is why it is so important for us to consider what kind of music we provide for our children to listen to. Shinichi Suzuki writes:

*'Once art to me was something far off, unfathomable and unattainable. It was Mozart who taught me to know perfect love, truth, goodness and beauty.'*

*I am eternally a child on Mozart's bosom.*

*Bach, Mozart, Beethoven – without exception they live clearly and palpably in their music, and speak forcefully to us, purifying us, refining us, and awakening in us the highest joy and emotion.*

*The situation now (as at 13 March 1988)*

We now have 50 Suzuki families who learn to sing by the Suzuki Method. Our experiences have been encouraging.

The new-born baby really identifies the melodies which the mother and father have listened to and sung to the baby through pregnancy. The babies whose mothers sang to them immediately after birth stopped crying or did not cry at all when they heard the familiar voices and melodies. The songs were 'Twinkle' and Mozart's 'Lullaby'.

We are always surprised when we have singing lessons, because the five babies at the lesson with their mothers are concentrating so much on the music. They hardly ever cry. They enjoy themselves, and their baby talk (prattle) is like singing.

We all are very enthusiastic about this experiment. The Suzuki singing method is growing with, and through, the child.

## Why Suzuki?

by Margery V. Aber

The practice interview for medical school applicants held at Brown University for Liz Wrone proved especially interesting since her credentials included thirteen years of Suzuki training. Her medical school adviser said that this background would be particularly valuable. Indeed this was the case when she had her real interviews with representatives of five of America's most prestigious medical schools. Questions regarding Suzuki were in the forefront by all of her interviewers. With Suzuki training so much a part of her life it was easy for Liz to relax while giving enthusiastic accounts of how she had memorised many volumes of music; how she had private lessons while being observed by parents and their children who shared the lesson times; how she had played in many, many concerts both as soloist and as a part of large and small groups. As she looked right into the eyes of her enquirers, which is important in all communication, she exuded confidence, sparkle and the ability to be herself. She was asked about private lessons versus group lessons like 'marathons'. Her position was enhanced by the fact that she was involved with 3-18 year-olds throughout her musical education. What a boon for a doctor who must relate to all ages of patients! But is that not true in all walks of life?

Liz's credentials are strong in all academic areas. Credit for this, besides an inherent intellect, can be given Liz because she has learned the art of listening and memorising. Her ability to hear a tune and reproduce it made listening to a

professor, and memorising facts, unique. Her mind had developed a sharp focus because concentration in learning pieces was important. Liz also learned discrimination, making judgements about tone, pitch (intonation) and phrasing. Her teachers instructed her in problem solving, showing her how to practice in ways which would make performance easier, quicker. Self discipline was imperative. Another advantage which Liz had in her interviews was an ability to share her feelings about herself and concerning her goals in life. The interviewers were able to enter the usually private aura which surrounds each of us, because in her lessons Liz's teachers had to be able to speak to her 'eyeball to eyeball', and to touch her physically in order to help her to place her fingers correctly, to do vibrato or to make her bow go straight. This involved trust, faith and inherent respect, all of which show in Liz's character.

Why Suzuki? Liz will be a splendid doctor because her sensitivities to life and living with all of its challenges have been well rehearsed as she learned to play the violin and to express her inner self through music. Hers is a success story which all children can achieve through the innovative Suzuki 'method', nurtured by love. It is true: 'Anything can be accomplished where love is deep, given the right environment.' Every child deserves a splendid musical education, especially when the goal is to develop the human potential, which in turn will make for successful living.

A letter to the Managing Editor  
from Susan Grilli  
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Dear Marianne,

For the past two years, at Dr Suzuki's request, I have been travelling in the USA and Canada to train teachers interested in developing Suzuki-based early childhood programmes. I am writing to you because you have shown a great interest yourself in this relatively new form of Suzuki education. I am hoping you will be able to help me inform the rest of the Suzuki world and early educational professionals beyond it, about any new programmes dedicated to the idea that Suzuki is much, much more than music alone. My students are asking me to set up a network of

information, so that all of us can share in the work being done by each one, and each programme can benefit from the insights of all the others. This seems to be an important first step to take in increasing communications among us. An equally important step will be more and more articles submitted by many of you either in the SAA Journal or Newsletter. The Newsletter was designed for this very purpose of communication and articles for it can be more informally written than those for the Journal. From talking with many of you I know that your ideas should be shared more broadly with the whole of the SAA membership, and beyond.

Development of preschools, daycare centres and kindergartens 'in the Suzuki spirit', is occurring at a crucial time in the US educational thinking. It was no accident that President Bush chose the University of Virginia, designed by our first 'Education President' Thomas Jefferson, as the setting for the very important education summit of governors. Of course, we cannot know if President Bush will follow through with the top priority status he accorded the education of the country's youngest children, but I think we must proceed as if he will. I think we Suzuki teachers would be particularly wise to combine our efforts for these children with those of general early childhood educators, a group far larger than ours and one that needs a bit of persuading that Suzuki instruction is 'developmentally appropriate'.

Too many influential leaders in the field of early childhood are all too vocal in their criticism of Suzuki as something they assume 'stresses' young children rather than stimulating them. We have a golden opportunity to expose *all* children to the kind of excellence that has been so meaningful to our Suzuki students, and to bring our expertise to the early childhood community which is just now banding together behind the rallying cry, 'Parents as Partners', something Dr Suzuki was actively encouraging fifty years ago! The naysayers, of course, need to be brought directly into the lively Suzuki classrooms themselves, where so much is being learned in such an atmosphere of fun. But in the meantime, writing about new and exciting programmes will be the next best thing, and I urge you to do so. Please also enclose any brochures or information sheets about these new programmes in letters to me for the new '**information bank**' about Suzuki and early education. I look forward to hearing from you!

## Suzuki Violin Teacher Wanted

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