



Twinkling The Ivories

June 2011

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Living the Suzuki Lifestyle

Recently I heard someone call the Suzuki Approach a lifestyle.

Looking back four years since my daughter first began taking lessons, I realize that it was not just my daughter who was immersed in the Suzuki Approach; it was our family who embraced it. We were living the Suzuki lifestyle.

At the beginning, there was a lot of trial and error to find out what worked for our family. Although some families wake up a little early to practice, it always worked better for us to practice right before supper. Many families listen to music in the car or first thing in the morning, but we loved to listen at night, while reading stories and continued deep into the night as Twinkles play on. Once we wove practice and listening into our day, the routine just became part of the fabric of our lives.

It seemed like whenever we needed inspiration to continue, there was a kind word from her music teacher that kept us on moving ahead. Group lessons encouraged camaraderie and shared learning experiences with jazzy repertoire. Fall Institutes brought Suzuki teachers from afar and Spring Festivals offered opportunities to chat with other Suzuki parents who have lived the lifestyle for years and whose children have grown up Suzuki. Even summer institutes provided us with adventures that bring smiles to our faces each time we recall the road trip with Suzuki friends to Langley. I still recall how exciting it was to hear the Claremont Trio live at the SAA Conference in Minneapolis; not only were they wonderful musicians, they were inspiring young people.

Joining the ESPS board aka "Orange Jackets" also expanded our Suzuki family with great conversation, laughs, lifelong friends and exciting plans to secure ESPS and offer enlivening experiences for our families and teachers. More recently, I have also been a keen follower of the SAA Parents as Partners web series and numerous articles that unite our global Suzuki family.

Suzuki stated, "Ability is one thing we have to produce (or work for) ourselves. That means to repeat and repeat an action until it becomes a part of ourselves." I truly appreciate all of the opportunities that ESPS has offered my family. Not only has my daughter begun to train her ear, learned toe-tapping rhythm, the ability to perform with confidence in front of an audience, but her family has developed a love of music, patience and the lesson that daily perseverance enables one to achieve great things.

Karen Spencer

Thank You to All of Our ESPS Volunteers

As we wrap up another successful term, we offer our thanks to all of our wonderful ESPS volunteers. Whether you worked during one of our special events, served as an adjudication assistant, set policy as a member of our Board of Directors, braved traffic as a driver extraordinaire, or worked a long shift at our casino, we thank you and appreciate your efforts.

Your commitment to Edmonton Suzuki Piano School allows us to offer our children so much more than just a weekly piano lesson. Your willingness to give a little extra time gives us the opportunity to provide something great for all of our families. Thank you! We couldn't do it without you.



Keeping Your Teen at the Piano: Commitment, Environment, Repertoire & Communication

The period of grades six through nine represent the time of greatest risk to your child's musical education. This is the most common time for young people to drop out and stop their piano lessons. My experience, however, is that all students who keep going through junior high and high school will be playing piano for the rest of their lives.

When I see former students or their parents, I hear about the new pieces they are learning. I always smile when the "whatever / I dunno" teen who was reluctant to talk to me in grade 8 becomes a friendly, communicative young adult in grade 9 or 10. The teens that keep going have many choices in terms of repertoire, because of their large bank of skills, and I have been amazed many times at the pieces they have learned on their own. "I found this piece by Chopin, and finished it all." For those of you struggling through pieces with your children, please keep this vision in mind.

I realize that the pressures of college or university lead many students to stop lessons at that point, since the students are so incredibly busy. Maybe your teen will study music! But if not, I have heard many times how the university students really appreciate being able to play the piano as a way to relax.

Teens get to start making significant choices (which junior high, electives, etc.), but a lot of choices are not allowed to young people until they are eighteen. Quitting an instrument after years of investing time and money is a very significant decision. When parents demonstrate commitment to piano, this is a huge factor in continuing. Suzuki said we are children of our environment; parental commitment is perhaps the biggest factor in a supportive environment.

The overall approach is significant. Parents do not ask their children, "Would you like to continue school next year?" Some things are not a matter of choice. So why ask, "Would you like to continue piano?" If you are truly committed, and love music, it need not be a matter of discussion. "In our family, we do piano." It is normal for teenagers to want to exert independence; you may decide to let them be independent about something else.

Some young people are very influenced by their peers, and may feel that "because so-and-so is quitting, I should be able to quit too," and so it is important to take note of all those who indeed are continuing their lessons.

A positive and flexible approach will help prevent many issues. Families do need a strategy to stay at the piano.

You may find that your teen resists practicing. Most professional pianists have challenges in practicing! Most students will have already faced a period of less interest in piano in the past. This is normal; it is the same with other activities that continue over many years, such as school itself. So if your teen is practicing less, this is not the end of piano. Talk with your teacher about this: students must practice enough to keep going forward, but it might be appropriate to cut them some slack. There is a big difference between going slower and stopping altogether. But obviously, playing more brings more progress, more enjoyment, and more motivation.

If teens are too busy with other activities; that could be a problem and you may need to figure out a time management plan to get in more practicing. Be as patient as you can, and expect that there will be less productive times, but keep your eyes on the goal -- that they will keep going.

Parents can have the title of Cheerleader and Motivator Extraordinaire. Celebrate your child's achievements at the concerts and graduations. Make sure you attend these, along with group class, the Fall Institute, the Spring Festival, etc. Active participation in the Suzuki program demonstrates your commitment. Having piano friends can make a huge difference; this is one of the reasons for groups; teens need time with their peers.

I have never met an adult who said, "I'm sure glad my parents let me quit piano." On the contrary, I have often heard from adults, "My parents let me quit as a teenager, and I sure wish they hadn't!"

Tim Eckert

Notice all the good things they do at the piano, and make them aware of their progress. Take an interest in what they are learning, yet let them be as independent as possible. Know their pieces, and ask for your favourite piece among the ones they are learning. Going to concerts can be very motivating; the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra regularly features pianists, as does the Edmonton Recital Society, the music departments of the U of A and MacEwan, and the Yardbird Suite. Other motivators: playing jazz piano in high school bands, going to our many music festivals, learning repertoire from your cultural background, and making a recording for grandparents, or YouTube.

Bring good music into your home: Use the ESPS lending library, and the Edmonton Public Library. In a recent newsletter I had names of pianists on YouTube. Go shopping at a music store, or online. The library has thousands of music books and CDs to use.

Make a special request to your teen for him or her to learn a favourite piece of yours. It is important that they see your own passion for music.

Make sure you have a good piano; remember that pianos generally do not lose their value, and last for many decades. A good instrument is a sign of your commitment.

Beyond your commitment and a supportive and stimulating environment, there are two key factors: repertoire and communication. Teens are advanced enough in the Suzuki repertoire to be able to add in additional music. The Suzuki books are designed for a broad musical education but they are not the last word in repertoire. To continue over the long term, the teen must find his or her own voice in terms of interests and musical interpretation. Maybe they would want to learn music their friends like, experiment in a band, or compose their own music.

It is helpful when students communicate such things as likes and dislikes about extra repertoire choices with the teacher. We need, as a student-parent-teacher team, to find the repertoire that compels the student to the piano. The joy of the music itself is a worthwhile and satisfying goal.

Keeping the lines of communication open is crucial. Make sure that both parents read this article. When teens are in the "I dunno" stage, teachers need to hear even more from parents. If there are challenges at home about piano, we need to know!

You as the parent need your own motivation: concerts and good CDs will inspire you too.

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So, yes, you can keep your teen moving forward:

- *Be supportive, patient and flexible*
- *Find compelling repertoire*
- *Provide a social aspect to piano*
- *Be a cheerleader*
- *Go to concerts*
- *Participate in the Suzuki program*
- *Listen to good music*
- *Communicate with the teacher*

Tim Eckert

Add Some Music to Your Summer!

Edmonton's summer festivals offer an incredible opportunity to experience a wide variety of musical genres. Share your favourites with your kids as you enjoy summertime in Edmonton!

Edmonton International Jazz Festival

June 24 – July 3, 2011

Sounds of Old Strathcona Music Festival

July 8 – 10, 2011

Capital Ex

July 22 – 31, 2011

Blueberry Bluegrass and Country Music Festival

July 29 – 31, 2011

Edmonton Folk Music Festival

August 4 – 7, 2011

Cariwest – Edmonton Caribbean Arts Festival

August 5-7, 2011

Edmonton Blues Festival

August 19-21, 2011

Symphony Under the Sky Festival

September 2 – 5, 2011

Kaleido Family Arts Festival

September 9 – 11, 2011

Annual General Meeting – September 28, 2011

All parents are asked to attend our Annual General Meeting, to be held on September 28, 2011 at Suzuki Charter School. In addition to reporting on our year and presenting of our audited financial statements, we'll also be holding elections for membership on our Board of Directors.

We're looking for parents to serve as volunteers on the Board. No previous Board experience is required; rather, we are looking for parent representatives who are committed to providing their children a positive musical education and who are interested in helping to shape the future direction of Edmonton Suzuki Piano School. Whether you've been an ESPS member for one year or ten, your perspective is valuable!

The Board of Directors meets at Suzuki Charter School on the last Wednesday of every month. Meetings generally last only an hour, and there are great snacks to tempt one's palate.

If you are interested in getting involved with the Board of Directors, please contact Kim Green at 780.488.0548 for more information.

Thanks to the City of Edmonton!

At our recent Spring Festival, participating students received a free admission pass to the Valley Zoo along with their performance certificates. ESPS thanks the City of Edmonton, Community Services for their donation of 100 free admission passes.

2011-2012 Calendar

September 28, 2011 *Annual General Meeting*

October 23, 2011 *Graduation*

November 5 & 6, 2011 *Fall Institute*

January 22, 2012 *Graduation*

February 5, 12, & 26, 2012 *Winter Recitals, Suzuki Charter School*

March 18, 2012 *Graduation*

April 21, 2012 *Spring Festival*

June 3, 2012 *Group Concert*

June 10 & 17, 2012 *Summer Recitals, Convocation Hall*

June 24, 2012 *Graduation*

June 2011 Graduations

Congratulations to the following students for their hard work and well-deserved graduations:

Volume 1

Olivia Amodio
Hamish Chan
Owen Dubbeldam
Meredith Graham
Teaghan Haysom
Mira MacMillan
Allison Nguyen
Ping Nixon-Hermansen
Nicole Sicotte
Tristan Tsang
Muskaan Visram
Mataia Wong
Jocelyn Zhou

Volume 2

Sadie Bowling
Kary Chen
Connor Chin
Julianna Graham
James Gray
Dariush Khani-Hanjani
Patrick Kowalik
Ksenia Pankratyeva
Thaddaeus Truong

Volume 3

Charisse Chan
Weronika Chlebek
Sophie Jackson
Sam Kohan
Terrance Lam
Delane Linkiewich
Tatiana Marciniak
Lara Percival
Quinn Sweetzir

Volume 4

Selma Hammad
Jessica Mah
Christopher Otto
Jacob Paetsch
Vivian Wong