



# Twinkling The Ivories

February 2015

## Celebrating 40 Years!

### Ruth Johnson Looks Back at ESPS' History

#### Board of Directors

Rolinda Graham  
Betty Lee  
Tammy Field-Compri  
Merrie Zubritsky  
Meleena Doroshenko  
Roxanne Fraser  
Marci Friesen  
Eve Zuk

#### Teachers

Melanie Bodnar  
Tess Brown  
Tim Eckert  
Brad Heintzman  
Heather Hindman  
Ruth Johnson  
Regine Maier  
Rhonda McEachen  
Gail Olmstead  
Alla Rekhson  
Joyce Sipsas  
Nancy Thornhill  
Eleanor Tsui  
Ken Zeller

#### Administrator

Kim Green

#### Contact ESPS

Phone 780.488.0548  
Fax 780.488.0538

Forty years ago! This was before many of you reading this article were born. Perhaps some of you were in playschool or kindergarten. It was 1975 and the Watergate Scandal and the Vietnam War dominated the nightly news. In Canada, Pierre Elliott Trudeau was Prime Minister, Peter Lougheed was Premier of Alberta, William Hawrelak was Mayor of Edmonton for the third time, and the Edmonton Eskimos won the Grey Cup.

And in a very modest house just north of Stony Plain Road, Mrs. Clarice Moellering had begun teaching the first Suzuki piano lessons in our city. She had recently arrived here from California, having encountered Suzuki method and done some initial training there. Clarice had a nurturing and gregarious personality and was always ready to share her ideas and enthusiasm. It wasn't long before she had recruited and "trained" more teachers in the Suzuki method right here in Edmonton.

Over time, she met these teachers regularly to discuss concerns and share successes. She also gathered together the parents of the students she taught, to educate and better equip them to help their children at home. She did NOT come to Edmonton to establish a music school but as the parents and teachers collaborated for recitals, workshops, and piano parties, the idea evolved over the next couple of years. The Edmonton Suzuki Piano School was formally established in 1977 as a registered non-profit society, with a Board of Directors, a constitution, and bylaws that still govern our organization today.

Clarice Moellering moved back to California in 1982, transferring her students to the remaining five teachers and leaving a great, heartfelt void in the teachers' group. Happily, three of those five teachers are still with ESPS today. Tess Brown joined in 1977, Ruth Johnson in 1979, and Nancy Thornhill in 1980.

Much of the programming offered today by ESPS had its roots in those early days: teacher training workshops, parent orientation workshops, formal recitals, monthly group lessons, graduation recitals as the students completed a book, and regular newsletters. In 1980 we presented our first Fall Institute (now known as the Fall Workshop), a weekend event with visiting Master Teachers and enrichment activities.

Thus there was a good structure to our piano program, and there were strong and passionate parents on the Board, ensuring the continuance and prosperity of ESPS during the 80's. From the beginning, those parents who have served on the Board have been VERY much appreciated by the teachers and their contribution has been considerable. One individual who served as President during that time was Sandy Wright. She had energy, vision and charisma and was a great help to the teachers! One distinct memory I have of Sandy is her suggestion that we have a summer institute and invite Mrs. Kataoka:

*Mrs. Haruko Kataoka, (1927 – 2004) known to those who followed her and loved her as Kataoka Sensei, was the piano teacher who studied with, and worked directly with Dr. Suzuki in*

## Celebrating 40 Years, continued

*Matsumoto. She, Dr. Suzuki, and his sister-in-law co-founded the Suzuki Piano Method, and established the repertoire and technique. Since the 1970's piano teachers from all over the world travelled to Japan to study with her and Dr. Suzuki for anywhere from a few weeks to several years to become trained in the method. She also became an international ambassador for Suzuki Piano and travelled extensively to North and South America, Australia and beyond to train teachers in the method and to educate parents and students. Worldwide, there are and have been, since the early 1970's, many excellent Suzuki piano teachers and Teacher Trainers but they all lead back to Mrs. (Dr.) Kataoka. Her influence and legacy cannot be overstated. Being a truly exceptional and excellent piano teacher, she challenged and inspired teachers, parents and students to listen, study, practice, and research.*

So when Sandy Wright proposed that we invite this prestigious Kataoka Sensei to Edmonton it seemed an impossible and preposterous idea! Much to our surprise she accepted. For a few years in the mid-80's we had summer institutes with the ultimate Master Teacher from Japan, working with our students and teachers. We've not had it so good since!

The biggest event that ESPS has been involved with was the 7<sup>th</sup> Suzuki International Conference held here in Edmonton in 1985, hosted by the Society for Talent Education and the Edmonton Suzuki Piano School. Sandy Wright, along with piano teachers Charlene Astrom and Tess Brown, were pivotal in organizing the piano portion of this conference. For a full week in August the U of A campus was the setting for violin, cello and piano lessons, lectures, numerous recitals, and concerts in Convocation Hall and the Jubilee Auditorium. It was a remarkable and truly exciting time. Dr. and Mrs. Suzuki attended as well as Mrs. Kataoka and string and piano teachers from all over the world. I have wonderful memories of hearing astonishing performances by students from Japan and observing Dr. Suzuki teach.

Dr. Merlin Thompson, a perennial teacher at our annual Fall Workshops, is one of those piano teachers who spent 3 years in Japan studying with Dr. Suzuki and Dr. Kataoka. He was the first Canadian piano teacher to become a Teacher Trainer in 1986. In 1988, when Merlin became Director of the Suzuki Piano Program at Mount Royal College in Calgary, summer institutes with Dr. Kataoka moved from Edmonton to Calgary. For a few summers several Edmonton Suzuki piano families and teachers planned their summer schedules around these August institutes.

Having Merlin in Calgary presented us here at ESPS with an unprecedented opportunity to learn more than we'd ever been able to before. He generously shared the wealth of knowledge and experience he had acquired in Japan. We have been fortunate and grateful to have him so close as a resource and mentor. Also, it was his inspiration that resulted in ESPS establishing a yearly non-competitive Spring Festival in 1989.

Another strong and memorable individual who joined ESPS in 1982 was teacher Charlene Astrom. It didn't take long for us teachers to recognize her leadership skills, and her vision for ESPS. She also understood the place of our school in the larger international Suzuki community and encouraged attendance at workshops and conferences beyond Edmonton.

In 1995 Suzuki Charter School began operations and ESPS was approached about working with the school. Charlene recognized the benefits for both societies in working together. She was the first piano teacher hired to teach the group piano classes in the SCS program. She also worked with SCS to provide students with high-quality instruments. Many of the pianos in use at SCS today, including the grand pianos, were bought by ESPS with casino funding. With the new association with the Suzuki Charter School, ESPS gained access to a friendly and flexible venue for events like the Fall Workshop, the Spring Festival, and group lessons.

Another area in which Charlene provided leadership was in re-establishing and reorganizing the focus of monthly group lessons. In the past, group lessons had been offered only on Saturday mornings in the Fine Arts Building, and our Graduations were combined with the group lessons there. The teachers were quite dissatisfied with how these group lessons were going and they were discontinued in 1990. As Charlene returned from teaching at the Calgary summer institutes and from attending SAA conferences, she brought reports back of programs in other places. She felt strongly that group and ensemble playing should be an integral part of our piano program as it was in so many other places. It took all of her impressive persuasive skills to convince the rest of us teachers to agree with her, and after approximately 10 years without group lessons they were re-introduced in the late 1990's.

## Celebrating 40 Years, continued

2005 was a special year for Suzuki in Edmonton. The Society for Talent Education was celebrating 40 years, the Suzuki Charter School had been operating for 10 years, and Edmonton Suzuki Piano School was celebrating its 30th anniversary. These three organizations collaborated for a long day celebration of concerts at the Winspear Centre on May 22, 2005. With much celebration, the students of ESPS performed the first and only highly successful five-piano concert on the Winspear stage. This was another exciting and memorable event for our piano families. It was also a dream that Charlene had cherished for a long time and she saw it fulfilled before her retirement in the summer of that same year.

Charlene's retirement was as difficult a loss for ESPS as losing Clarice Moellering had been years earlier. Not only had Charlene been a leader of the teachers, she had also been President of the Board for a term. She had also presented the Parent Orientation sessions to beginning parents, so every new family beginning lessons got to know her.

Since 2005, there have been more changes and developments for ESPS. Graduations were moved in 2006 to a more formal setting at Muttart Hall in Alberta College. Additionally, the Board and teachers had long discussed the pros and cons of hiring an administrator to work with the Board and to relieve the teachers of many of the administrative duties that the teachers had been doing on a volunteer basis. In 2007 our first administrator was hired. She worked for ESPS for a year and the following year our current administrator, Kim Green, accepted a position and quickly became an indispensable TREASURE. Smart, skilled, organized, efficient and personable, Kim is on top of every aspect and angle of ESPS. Any misgivings we might have had about an administrator rapidly evaporated as we got to know Kim and as she put her heart into the job. We wonder how we ever got along without her! We are very fortunate to have her.

Much has changed in our world and in our city since 1975. Edmonton was only half of its current size. Fort Edmonton was brand new then, as was the Edmonton Coliseum (Rexall Place). There was as yet no WEM, LRT, nor Convention Center. There was no Folk Festival, Heritage Days, Fringe Theater Festival, nor Telus World of Science. Technology has so changed our modes of communication, vocabulary, travel, and entertainment that it wouldn't have been imagined in 1975. For ESPS families, technology has had a significant impact. Playing the recording then meant putting an LP on the turntable, or playing a cassette tape that a parent would have had to record from the LP! The now very familiar use of iTunes, iPhones, iPods, and our own website are relatively recent changes to how we do Suzuki here in Edmonton.

But for all the changes ESPS has seen, some things are the same – even timeless.

Listening daily to the Suzuki recordings is still, and always has been the heart, the essential core, of the Suzuki method. Daily practice is still necessary for progress and developing pianistic skill. Music still has and always has had the power to enrich our lives. Children still need nurturing, educating and loving. Children still have amazing potential. It is still true, as Dr. Suzuki learned and shared with us, that the study and practice of music will develop sensitivity, discipline, and endurance. It will create within the child a beautiful heart. What a great mission we have as Suzuki parents and teachers! *"Where love is deep, much can be accomplished."* – S. Suzuki

Ruth Johnson

"But for all the changes ESPS has seen, some things are the same – even timeless."

*Listening daily to the Suzuki recordings is still, and always has been the heart, the essential core, of the Suzuki method. Daily practice is still necessary for progress and developing pianistic skill. Music still has and always has had the power to enrich our lives. Children still need nurturing, educating and loving. Children still have amazing potential. It is still true, as Dr. Suzuki learned and shared with us, that the study and practice of music will develop sensitivity, discipline, and endurance. It will create within the child a beautiful heart. What a great mission we have as Suzuki parents and teachers!"*

## Start Planning Your Summer Institute Adventure!

Each year, dozens of Suzuki communities around North America offer Summer Institutes. These institutes are special camps that provide a musical experience for families with children who are studying piano or other instruments. Institutes feature activities for students, parents and teachers in one-week sessions throughout the summer. Families attend the institute together and participate in a wide range of musical and enrichment activities.

This year, piano institutes are being offered in places as diverse as New Orleans, Montreal, and Los Angeles. If you'd like to travel to an Institute a little closer to home, think about attending one in Langley B.C. Held July 13-16, 2015, the **Langley Community Music School Suzuki Workshop** will feature Master Teacher Susan Magnusson, who many at ESPS will know as a popular Guest Teacher at our Fall Workshops.

The folks there promise: *"Langley Community Music School is a centre for excellence in music education, located in the beautiful Fraser Valley. Our Suzuki workshops are a highlight of the summer for Suzuki families. Join us and experience music-making in a nurturing and fun environment!"*

A complete listing of Summer Institutes throughout North America (for all instruments) can be found at [www.suzukiassociation.org/events/institutes/](http://www.suzukiassociation.org/events/institutes/).



*Teacher Rhonda McEachen and her daughter Mae perform a duet at a local senior's centre*

## Twinkling the Ivories at Providence Centre with Rhonda McEachen's Studio

Every year, one of the events I organize for my students is a concert at a nursing home. For the past few years we have been performing for the retired Catholic sisters who live at Providence Centre.

The Sisters at Providence Centre are the best audience you can imagine. They quietly enjoy all of the performers from the youngest playing Twinkle D to the teenagers playing popular songs. Last year one of the Sisters laughed joyfully to see a young girl in a beautiful spring dress. Another Sister chuckled when one of the pieces ended in a slow and quiet glissando.

There are many residents at Providence Centre who aren't well enough to come down from the 2nd and 3rd floors for the concert. That doesn't matter because the concert is aired over the P.A. system so that everyone can enjoy it.

The Providence Centre provides a beautiful reception for the children and their families to enjoy after the concert. It is during this time that the families visit with the Sisters. Many of the Sisters were once teachers and nurses and enjoy the conversations with the children and their families. I remind my families that part of the concert is staying afterwards and sharing in the fellowship.

Planning a concert at a nursing home is quite easy to do. Most nursing homes have a Recreation Coordinator and you can phone and ask if they would like you to bring some children to perform for the seniors. All they nursing home needs to provide is a piano and some chairs. I don't make a formal programme for these concerts, but instead announce each performer and what they will be playing. Sometimes I ask the children to tell everyone their favourite dessert, subject at school, or colour.

At last year's concert, one of my younger students started out sitting right next to me. I was up and down adjusting the bench and footstool, and after a while I noticed he wasn't sitting there anymore. I looked for him, and there he was, sitting on a rocking chair with one of the Sisters! After his turn to play the piano, he returned to his comfortable spot on the rocking chair. What a sweet moment!

In January, the Recreation Coordinator called me and said that the Sisters have been asking when the children will be coming. I booked a Saturday in April and I'm looking forward to another great concert at Providence Centre!

*Rhonda McEachen*

## In Conversation with ESPS Alumni: Zosha DiCastrì

*Zosha DiCastrì began piano lessons at Edmonton Suzuki Piano School at the age of 3, studying first with Mary-Jane Schuler, and then Ruth Johnson. After completing the Suzuki repertoire (Book 7) while in grade 10, Zosha continued piano lessons for the last two years of high school with Michael Massey (orchestral pianist with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra). In grade 12, Zosha also had the opportunity to participate in the ESO Young Composers Program. She continued to study music at McGill University in Montreal, where she did a double major in piano performance and composition. In 2014, Zosha earned a Doctorate of Composition degree from Columbia University in New York, where she is currently an Assistant Professor of Music in Composition. Zosha is married to Canadian composer David Adamcyk, and they just welcomed their first child, Leonora, this January. ESPS Teacher Melanie Bodnar recently checked in with Zosha, and they talked about growing up as a Suzuki piano student.*



Photo by David Adamcyk

**ESPS:** *What were some of your favourite Suzuki pieces?*

**ZOSHA:** I really enjoyed *Wild Rider* (Book 3) and *Gigue* (Book 4). In Book 1, my favourite piece was *Christmas Day Secrets*.

**ESPS:** *Did you like practicing?*

**ZOSHA:** In general, I always liked playing the piano. From about the ages of 9-12 practicing was more difficult, and my mom had to push me a bit.

**ESPS:** *Do you have any practicing suggestions, strategies, or tips?*

**ZOSHA:** #1: Have a goal in mind before you begin a practice spot or piece.

#2: Have a piece you enjoy playing for fun as a "treat" at the end of your practice session.

#3: Attend institutes and workshops in Edmonton and in other cities. My family always attended the Calgary Summer Institute, and it was great to meet others who were learning Suzuki piano as well as to get another perspective from master teachers. I was always interested in what other teachers had to say and I listened attentively, even as a young child. Following a Summer Institute when the home practice was not going well, my mom put on a pair of dollar store glasses with a big nose and mustache and talked with a funny accent, pretending to be a visiting professor. It worked for a while to get me to practice - and it remains one of my favourite Suzuki memories!

**ESPS:** *Do you have any words of encouragement for current Suzuki students and parents?*

**ZOSHA:** Having music in your life is a gratifying experience and you get something different out of music at every point in your life. Toys you will outgrow, but music will grow with you. When there are difficult times in your musical journey, persevere, and music will not abandon you.

**ESPS:** *Did your Suzuki piano education help you in your current career?*

**TO BE CONTINUED, page 6**

*Attend institutes and workshops in Edmonton and in other cities. My family always attended the Calgary Summer Institute, and it was great to meet others who were learning Suzuki piano as well as to get another perspective from master teachers. I was always interested in what other teachers had to say and I listened attentively, even as a young child. Following a Summer Institute when the home practice was not going well, my mom put on a pair of dollar store glasses with a big nose and mustache and talked with a funny accent, pretending to be a visiting professor. It worked for a while to get me to practice - and it remains one of my favourite Suzuki memories!*

## In Conversation, continued

**ZOSHA:** It certainly did; it is a huge benefit to start young. The musicianship skills that Suzuki students develop, the strong ear...gave me a big advantage, not only in university in general, but also in composition. A composer must have a highly developed "inner ear": one has to imagine sounds before they are produced. It is also advantageous for a composer to be a performer – someone who is able to empathize with those who will be performing your works so that nothing impossible is written for them! A Suzuki education gave me all of this.

**ESPS:** *What is your favourite genre of music to listen to now?*

**ZOSHA:** I like a variety of genres: Classical, Jazz, Folk...

**ESPS:** *Who is your favourite pianist?*

**ZOSHA:** Lately I have been listening a lot to the French pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard. He plays a lot of Debussy and contemporary music which is really interesting.

**ESPS:** *What are some of the musical projects you have undertaken?*

**ZOSHA:** I have been writing all different kinds of music: chamber, orchestral, electronic music. More recently I have been involved in interdisciplinary projects, combining dance and visual arts (such as video) with music, and even writing music for sculptures that make sounds!

**ESPS:** *Any concluding remarks?*

**ZOSHA:** Happy Anniversary ESPS! May you continue to exist for decades to come.

*Thank you, Zosha, for taking the time for this interview. We wish you all the best in your future both as a composer/musician, and as a new mother!*

## 2014/2015 Calendar

**March 1, 2015** *Winter Recitals at Suzuki Charter School*

12:30 *Students of Ken Zeller*

1:30 *Students of Tim Eckert*

3:00 *Students of Joyce Sipsas and Regine Maier*

**March 8, 2015** *ESPS at the ESO Event*

**March 14, 2015** *Spring Festival at Suzuki Charter School*

**April 12, 2015** *Graduation Ceremony at Muttart Hall*

**April 18, 2015** *Parent Workshop for Beginner Families at SCS*

**April 29, 2015** *ESPS General Meeting at Suzuki Charter School*

**May 3, 2015** *Groups Concert at Suzuki Charter School*

**June 7 & 14, 2015** *June Recitals at Convocation Hall & Muttart Hall*

**June 21, 2015** *Graduation Ceremony at Muttart Hall*

## February 2015 Graduations

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

### **Volume 1**

Abby Bulawka  
Emma Bulawka  
Max Bulawka  
Claire Gutenberg  
John Morrison

### **Volume 2**

Julia Dantas  
Rhys Guillaume  
Nathan Oddoye  
Asher Thomas

### **Volume 3**

Jonah Koller  
Mae MacDonald  
Elena Oberg  
Sophia Salouk  
Sara Visram  
Galen Wei

### **Volume 4**

Nicholas Brubaker  
Silas Truong  
Thaddaeus Truong

### **Volume 5**

Quinn Sweetzir  
Claudia Wang  
Marcus Wong

*Teaching music is not my main purpose. I want to make good citizens. If children hear fine music from the day of their birth and learn to play it, they develop sensitivity, discipline and endurance. They get a beautiful heart.*

Dr. Shinichi Suzuki