



TWINKLING THE IVORIES

September 2016

WELCOME (BACK) TO ESPS!

The Edmonton Suzuki Piano School provides musical development to students, parents and teachers, following the Suzuki Method. We seek to create a learning community, which embraces excellence and nurtures the human spirit.

For more than forty years, Edmonton Suzuki Piano School and its dedicated group of teachers has offered individual and group lesson programming, inspiring special events, and parent and teacher educational opportunities to its membership. Thank you for being a part of our community of students, teachers, and parents! We appreciate your commitment to daily practice, attendance at our great group classes and participation in events like our Fall Workshop and our recitals. We welcome you to a new year! Read on to discover what's in store for the coming year.

A NEW LOOK FOR ESPS

Over the summer we've been hard at work developing our new logo and website. We hope you enjoy our leap into the future and all of the enhanced features we are now able to offer at www.edmontonsuzukipiano.ca: downloadable event listings, links to maps for our special event venues, search-ability, an improved classifieds page for ESPS members, and even the ability to comment and post.

But we continue to offer some of our original features, too. You'll still find group class schedules, our great *Tools and Resources* section, where you can discover all kinds of practice pages, tips for success at home, and even a game or two. And the website will continue to be a resource for news and upcoming events.

Construction is not quite complete, so watch for a few more improvements to the website in the near future!

2016/2017 EVENTS CALENDAR

- September 17, 2016** Parent Orientation Workshop at Suzuki Charter School
- September 28, 2016** Annual General Meeting at Suzuki Charter School
- October 22 & 23, 2016** Fall Workshop at Suzuki Charter School
- November 2 & 3, 2016** ESPS Casino, Casino Edmonton, Argyll Road
- November 6, 2016** Graduation Ceremony at Muttart Hall, MacEwan University
- February 5, 2017** Graduation Ceremony at Muttart Hall, MacEwan University
- February 5, 12, and 26, 2017** Winter Recitals at PCL Hall, MacEwan University
- March 19, 2017** Graduation Ceremony at PCL Hall, MacEwan University
- April 22, 2017** Spring Festival at Suzuki Charter School
- May 7, 2017** Groups Concert at Suzuki Charter School
- June 3, 4, 10 & 11, 2017** June Recitals at Convocation Hall, University of Alberta
- June 18, 2017** Graduation Ceremony at Muttart Hall, MacEwan University

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THE MOTHER TONGUE APPROACH: IN PRACTICE

Dr. Suzuki calls his method the mother-tongue approach. This is a great metaphor to emphasize parent/child dynamics in music learning. Parents are responsible for creating a nurturing environment for young learners so that learning happens with ease. Having a clear understanding of the differences and similarities between language acquisition and piano studying has helped me to be a more motivated and disciplined Suzuki parent.

There are two key differences. First, acquiring language is a necessity in life while playing piano is not. We'll never question why we want to speak our mother tongue. But at some point, we'll ask why we invest time and energy into piano studying. Second, acquiring language can be done mostly by passive learning. Every child learns to speak a mother tongue. Studying piano requires much more active learning. Listening to CDs is important, but it is far from enough.

Knowing the differences, the question is how we make piano studying feel natural to kids as learning their mother tongue. The challenge is for parents: *How do we deliberately create similar motivations and practice habits?* Here are three things that have worked for my family:

1. **Desirable external rewards.** For my son, it's a 15-minute iPad time after each 45-minute session of piano practice. This one is controversial. Empirical and experimental research in business, psychology, and behavioral economics have repeatedly shown that external rewards are less effective than internal drive to solicit efforts. Parents can feel uncertain about using rewards because of the worry that external rewards may suppress the genuine love of music. For older kids, this is likely correct. For Suzuki students at a young age, I believe external rewards to be effective and appropriate. Language is a means to satisfy kids' strong desire to communicate and get what they want. Unless your child is a prodigy, kids won't have a desire to repeat the twinkles voluntarily every day. Giving kids something they really like after piano practice is a positive way to mimic language acquisition. When kids get older, they will find their own motivation or definition of "an end".
2. **Daily practices.** That is seven days a week, not six or five. We talk every day, don't we? Some days, we may talk less but we still talk! We can certainly squeeze in a 15-minute practice no matter how busy we are that day. Habits require consistency and regularity. Daily habits are actually the easiest to stick to in the long run.
3. **Parental participation.** For young kids, Suzuki parents are supposed to be an integral part of every single practice. It is not easy to be there every day and always bring positive energy. I have found myself being a negative force in my son's practice on several occasions. Each time, it was because I focused too much on the music itself. Practices usually are more fruitful and smooth when we completely disregard the differences between his performance and the CD. I have to constantly remind myself why we study piano. Being able to connect oneself to people and the world with music in the future is just one reason. Whether he will be able to do that or even want to do that is out of my control. What I value the most is the consciousness in the process of developing a skill. When our kids try to learn their mother tongue, they do feel frustrated at times when they cannot make themselves understood. They may try different ways. Sometimes they give up and cry but they will try again after they calm down. The process unfortunately is largely not remembered by kids. Daily piano practice is a perfect opportunity to develop awareness and familiarity with the physical and psychological sensations in learning new skills.

This is our chance to be with our kids in a learning process that happens daily. Our positive influences will stay with them and will manifest in future learning processes.

Li Zhou, ESPS Parent



Coming Soon: Fall Workshop

October 22 & 23, 2016

Registration forms will soon be available from your teacher!

PARENT ORIENTATION WORKSHOP

Saturday September 17, 2016
Room 4/5
Suzuki Charter School

(The main doors will be locked: enter through the north parking lot entrance)

Families who are new to our program are required to attend this workshop. The three-hour session provides information about the Suzuki approach, ideas for establishing a successful practice environment at home, and answers to any questions that may have come up as you begin your journey as a Suzuki parent. The class is also open to families looking for a refresher class.

Note: Parents who attended the Parent Orientation Workshop in the spring do not need to attend this session.

SIMPLIFYING SEPTEMBER

Summer slips by so quickly and it always seems like parents are standing in the school playground on the first day of school repeating the same phrases, “I don’t know where the summer went!” or “Wow! I wasn’t ready for all of this to start again!”

As a young mother I did not understand what the more seasoned mothers were referring to when they spoke of “all this”. Now after twenty years of preparing children for the first day of school, I deeply appreciate what “all of this” entails. For most families it includes (but is by no means restricted to) school supply shopping, haircuts, sport registration, packing lunches, devising driving schedules, re-establishing bedtimes and of course the start up of music lessons. It is remarkable that anyone survives September!

It isn’t easy to simplify the tasks associated with a new school year (if there is away to lessen driving times in Edmonton I have yet to figure it out) but it occurred to me this year that music is one area in which a Suzuki parent can definitely simplify - both for themselves and their child. After having been a parent to six Suzuki children what follows are some humble suggestions that may serve to simplify the start of a new music year for your family.

First, discuss and establish a practice schedule with your child before their first music lesson. Finding time to practice is perhaps one of the most challenging tasks a parent has to be responsible for when their child is young. Younger children need help structuring a timetable and it is always easier to make a schedule when you are relaxed rather than caught up in the chaos of daily life. Listen to your child and they will usually have a solid sense of when they like to “do music”. Some of my children LOVED to practice before school and some could ONLY practice after the sun set. If it works for them, and it can work for you, then you have found the ideal time. Once you have the time established, do your best to stick to it! Children thrive on consistency.

Second, try to be realistic in what you expect from yourself and your child as the music year swings into gear. The school day can be mentally, emotionally and physically draining for both young children and adolescents in September. They may not have a great deal of energy left at the end of each day to devote to practice. September practices may need to be a little shorter (and perhaps a little easier) to allow your child/teen to adjust to the demands of a new year. Review the pieces they love and ease into the working pieces at a pace they can manage. Listening to the Suzuki CD’s will also serve to make the review process easier and help a tired child relax after a demanding day. Students and parents need to rebuild their musical stamina after a long summer!

Another way to simplify the start of the year is to make sure that practice materials are assigned a readily available spot in your house. Dr. Suzuki was clear when he suggested 10 000 repetitions are necessary to master a skill. What he didn’t mention was you can easily spend 10 000 hours hunting for misplaced music materials. Years ago a Suzuki teacher shared a secret with me on how to simplify practice. She said that practices are easier if a parent is interactive at lessons. She encouraged me to pay close attention to what she was trying to share with my child during their lesson time. She welcomed questions at the end of each lesson and suggested I record the working points of the lesson in a journal. Nowadays iPads and iPhones can be brought into the lesson if they are to be used as recording tools to assist home practice. They can be invaluable when child and parent have a different recollection of what transpired at the lesson. Regardless of whether the parent is handwriting the notes, or recording electronically, it is vital that the parent record EXACTLY what the teacher wants practiced at home. In a busy month it is important to use your time effectively, and focus precisely, on the working points outlined at the lesson.

Finally, during this rather hectic month take time to put the multi-tasking on hold and just focus on one activity. For me the favourite time of day was when I had a chance to sit with my child, in either their lesson or practice, and just enjoy my amazing child/teenager. In lessons it was inspiring to observe them from a distance and watch them interact with their much loved teacher and in practice I was always astounded at how quickly they could master a skill if I was a patient practice partner. Enjoy this time ... the Twinkles morph into Sonatas far too quickly!

There will always be more tasks than there are hours in the day in September...it is an unwritten universal truth. Another universal truth is if you take the time to share your child’s music journey, every moment of that adventure will be one to be treasured. Think simple and cherish the start of this new school year ... you will only get 12 of them with each child.

Cathy Koller, ESPS Parent

Save the Date!

*Our annual **Fall Workshop** will take place on October 22 and 23, 2016. Registration details will be available at your teacher’s studio soon!*



INTRODUCING ESPS TEACHER HILLARY PAUL

ESPS extends a warm welcome to our newest teacher, Hillary Paul.

Hillary began studying piano when she was four years old in an early childhood music class in Grande Prairie. She studied piano as she grew up in the Suzuki method, eventually obtaining her Royal Conservatory of Music Level 10. While attending the University of Alberta for a B.Sc. (Hons) in Neuroscience, she taught piano to several students.

Through grade school Hillary played piano for a jazz ensemble, and learned the flute, playing in the high school band, attending National Band Festival twice as well as travelling to Europe twice on school trips. She also took voice lessons and now sings in her church's choir.

Hillary enjoys having the opportunity to work with families in developing their children musically and more importantly, helping them grow into wonderful people.

Hillary has completed her Suzuki Book One Training with Gail Lange and Suzuki Early Childhood with Wan Tsai Chen. Hillary is currently working towards her ARCT certification. Hillary will teach in the Hazeldean neighbourhood.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

*Wednesday, September 28, 2016
7:30 PM, Suzuki Charter School*

Have you ever considered joining our group of dedicated and enthusiastic board members to help us fulfill ESPS goals? We have a lot of exciting plans to benefit our children and would love your help. This year, we are seeking the help of several parents to serve on our Board of Directors in a variety of roles. Whether you are a beginner parent with ESPS or have been involved for many years, your perspective is valuable, and we welcome new volunteers.

Following the AGM, join us to share great practice ideas and some delicious desserts!

For more information about joining our Board of Directors, please speak to Kim Green at 780.488.0548

GROUP CLASSES BEGIN SOON!

As you know, teachers are piloting a new group class format in 2016/17. Each teacher will organize group classes from within their own studios. We think this model will realize a number of benefits:

- Cohesive groups for students, with a teacher who knows them well
- Better continuity in groups from year to year
- Families within each studio will get to know each other more easily, resulting in stronger communities where families can support each other
- Teachers will know their own students and can determine effective class sizes and identify who will work well together
- Music concepts like theory can be more thoroughly taught with follow-up and review at individual lessons
- Teachers will choose repertoire that more effectively meets the needs of their own students, and have better capacity to assist with learning at individual lessons

We will be monitoring and assessing this pilot in the coming year. We'd like to hear about your impressions, too. Watch for a parent survey in the spring.

In the meantime, your teacher will provide your child's group class schedule in early September. You can also find the schedule (which is downloadable to your ical or google calendar) on our website, www.edmontonsuzukipiano.ca.

HELP WANTED! CONSIDER VOLUNTEERING AT THE ESPS CASINO: NOVEMBER 2 & 3, 2016

With an uncertain economy it's become increasingly necessary for charities to ask their membership for help with fundraising. Fundraisers like our ESPS casino ensure we can continue offering comprehensive programming to ESPS families without having to increase fees.

Every 2 years, ESPS takes its turn to provide volunteer staffing at Casino Edmonton, on Argyll Road. In exchange for 2 long days of hard work by about 50 volunteers, ESPS receives a cheque for approximately \$75,000. That's a lot of money, and it goes a long way towards subsidizing teacher training, piano equipment and maintenance, facility rentals, and costs for group classes.

But we know it's a big commitment for you. That's why a casino shift counts as your volunteer commitment for two years. Essentially, casino volunteers receive a free pass from volunteering every second year.

The dates for ESPS' next casino are Wednesday November 2 and Thursday November 3, and we're looking for volunteers to work at a variety of jobs morning, noon and night. Many of you have already signed up to volunteer, and we thank you! If you haven't volunteered yet this year, please take the time to consider whether you might be available for this very important event. For more information, please contact Kim at 780.488.0548 or kgreen@edmontonsuzukipiano.ca.