



TWINKLING THE IVORIES

February 2018

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REFLECTIONS ON COMPETITION

An article in the American Suzuki Journal (Summer 2017) inspired me to reflect upon a word that is loaded with connotations: competition. Entitled "*What is Healthy Competition and why do we want to foster it?*", the article was penned by Australian Suzuki guitar teacher Meredith Connie. I highly recommend Suzuki parents and teachers alike to take a read through the insightful comments made therein, as the implications of competition - both positive and negative - effect us all, especially our impressionable children and students.

Connie makes the point that although "[c]ompetition, it can be said, is a driving force for self-betterment", it is also true that "[t]here is, however, a downside: it is the insidious transformation of the person with whom one is competing into an obstacle rather than a person, a dehumanization that makes the degradation and defeat of the opponent something to be celebrated." The Suzuki philosophy is, at its root, the antithesis of the latter quote, for Dr. Suzuki's original inspiration was not to make children into professional musicians, but rather, into fine human beings. His famous axiom "Beautiful tone, beautiful heart" emphasizes the fact that the more in touch one is with his or her own humanity, the more he/she will treat others with kindness and compassion.

I do not believe that competition should be eradicated in all areas of life. Think, for example, of sports. The fact that there is a "winning" team (or person) adds to the excitement of the game, race, or match. However, music is different because the very essence of the person (his/her "heart," says Dr. Suzuki) shines through the music. At its highest level, music is a type of "communion" - a flow of energy back and forth - between the musician and the audience. To rate music in that sense is to rate the essence of a person - and here, as Connie points out, there is no place for "winners" and "losers," for we are all of value and all have something beautiful to offer.

It is easy, however, to fall into the trap of comparing students and of rating them as "good" or "inferior." I do that when, as a teacher, I mentally compare my students and wish that they would all learn as quickly as Student A, or play as well as Teacher Z's students. I do that when, as a mother, I compare my children to others their age and take note of who is farther along in the repertoire. We all need reminders that music is not about winning but that it is a celebration of life, and therefore is for everyone. Each person brings to music his/her own unique abilities and challenges, and Dr. Suzuki teaches that each child should be nurtured.

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REFLECTIONS ON COMPETITION, CONTINUED

In her article, Connie defines healthy competition as "the interaction between individuals that promotes and fosters striving for higher achievements yet creates an environment where everyone in the group hopes that everyone will do well, rather than wish that others fail." She offers ideas to create an environment of healthy competition, such as collaborative games in group classes where students work together to beat the clock; playing together on the same instrument (one plays the right hand, the other the left hand); and activities where students take turns being the leader (such as the conductor of their ensemble). It then becomes in everyone's best interest that each person improves their skills and reach for the highest level of excellence that they can in that moment.

Months after reading this article, I find myself continuing to reflect on Connie's central question: "Is the Suzuki philosophy really about making the world a better place?" As I respond with a resounding yes, the challenge to put competition in its proper place and context is a good reminder as I seek to grow as a Suzuki teacher and parent.

Melanie Bodnar, ESPS teacher

CONGRATULATIONS BOOK 7 GRADUATE, DARIUSH KHANI-HANJANI!



On Sunday, March 11th, Book 7 student Dariush Khani-Hanjani will perform at a special recital to celebrate his completion of the Suzuki repertoire and the ESPS program. Dariush is a student of Regine Maier and Joyce Sipsas, and he'll perform works that include Beethoven's Pathetique Sonata, Clair de Lune by Debussy, and other pieces.

The concert will take place on Sunday, March 11 at 2:00 pm at PCL Hall (5th Floor) at Grant MacEwan's-Alberta College Campus (10050 MacDonald Drive). ESPS members are invited to enjoy this very special performance!

Dariush Khani-Hanjani - Biography

My name is Dariush Khani-Hanjani and I am in grade nine at Ottewell Jr. High. I was first exposed to music when listening to my mom and sister practicing violin and piano together. I fiddled around on the piano keys from a young age and started piano lessons with my mom when I was 4 and a half and continue lessons with her today.

I have also taken piano lessons with Tim Eckert (for the first two Suzuki piano books) and also with my other current teacher, Regine Maier (since book five Suzuki). As well as private lessons, I attended group class at Suzuki school and was taught by my mom, Tim Eckert and Ruth Johnson. While at Suzuki Charter Elementary School, I played in my first chamber group led by Rob Hryciw. I enjoy the challenge of learning new music and love to practice and perform my pieces.

Besides recitals and graduations, I have performed at many Suzuki piano festivals and participated in my first Kiwanis competition at the age of nine. I have received first and second prizes and have been given feedback and adjudicated by Joseph Fridman, Michel Fournier, Michael Massey, and Jacques Despreis. I also enjoy attending operas and ESO performances, musicals, and folk festivals, all of which have contributed to my appreciation of music. As well as classical piano, I like playing jazz, movie music, and improvising. I plan to transition into the Royal Conservatory program after graduating from Suzuki. When I started grade seven I began learning the trombone at Ottewell, and I enjoy playing in concert band and jazz band. My band teacher, Jayne Montgomery, encourages me to take risks in music.

My other hobbies besides music are skiing, mountain biking, building projects in my garage, and spending time with my dog Paisley, who always listens to me practice.

START PLANNING YOUR SUMMER INSTITUTE ADVENTURE!

Each year, countless 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 Chicago, Dallas, and San Diego. If you'd like to travel to an Institute a little closer to home, think about attending one in Calgary, Montreal or Waterloo, Ontario.

A complete listing of Summer Institutes throughout North America can be found at www.suzukiassociation.org/events/institutes/.

THE LASTING IMPACT OF OUR FIRST SUMMER INSTITUTE

The River City Suzuki Piano Institute of 2017 is the first Summer Piano Institute my son and I have ever attended. It was a great experience for both of us at the time. Now months have passed, when the details of the experience inevitably fades in our memory, a couple of its impacts remain.

The first impact is on daily practices. Mrs. Gail Lange demonstrated “The Three S’s” (“**Sections, Slowly, Separately**”) of piano practices during the Master Classes. She observed students’ performances, and identified specific sections that needed work, and required students to slowly and hands separately practice the targeted section, repeatedly. Another technique we noticed was to evaluate one’s own performance. After each repetition of an identified section, Mrs. Lange asked the student to give a score to this repetition and to explain why. The Master Classes were intense but very effective in terms of improving the piece at hand, but the impact goes far beyond.

My son has been incorporating these strategies into his daily practices. He told me that Mrs. Lange’s strategies echoed what he learned from *The Little Book of Talent* by Daniel Coyle. Daniel Coyle provided a tool to measure practice effectiveness, which he called the “**R.E.P.S. gauge**”: **R stands for Reaching and Repeating; E stands for Engagement; P stands for Purposefulness; and S stands for Strong, Speedy Feedback.** My son explains that identifying the sections is related to purposefulness and reaching. We should always know why we are doing a practice point and we should choose a target that’s out of our comfort zone but not painful when we do it slowly and hands separately. (His teacher Eleanor usually does this part for him. Eleanor emphasizes not only “hands separately”, but also “Strands separately” for certain pieces.) He believes that scoring each repetition is related to engagement and strong speedy feedback. When we self-evaluate a repetition, we engage our own ears and our own emotions, and the feedback is more intense and will be easier to incorporate into the next repetition.

I used to be the person who gave my son feedback during practices. Now he’s in book five, it’s getting harder for me. The Summer Institute marked a transition for us. My role in daily practices has becoming very minor. Honestly, Mrs. Lange’s strategies were not new to us, but my son seemed more receptive to Mrs. Lange’s method. I believe that one of the most valuable aspects of the Summer Institute is observing how other students improve over the four days using these strategies.

The second impact is on motivation and inspiration. My son loved Mrs. Lange’s master classes, but he found the ensemble classes with Mrs. Nancy Thornhill to be the most fun. He got to play piano with three other participants and really “play” with music. Mrs. Thornhill picked three very interesting pieces for them. To my son, playing piano normally is a solitary activity and classical music is something more serious and maybe delicate. He was excited to have fun with others and to be adventurous with music.

The ensemble classes inspired us to listen to a wide variety of piano music. Some we really liked. Some we didn’t. Some we couldn’t stand. It was fun to explore. One day we came across *Le Onde* by Ludovico Einaudi and both rushed to find out more. I read the novel *The Waves* again while listening to *Le Onde* with him. We both felt this incredible sentimental connection brought about by the power of literature and music. Also, my son added “noodling time” to his daily practices, during which he has some random fun with piano. Sometimes he reproduces something he heard. Sometimes he composes a tiny piece. It’s been very satisfying for us.

While I focus on the lasting impact of this Summer Institute for us, I’m fully aware that it could be the unique impact of the first time. Nonetheless, we’ll continue participating in future years because we love the music environment and the experience of connecting with other piano players and families. I strongly recommend parents to give it a try if you haven’t already.

COMING SOON: SPRING FESTIVAL

April 21, 2018 at Suzuki Charter School

On April 21st, come participate in the Spring Festival, our annual event that offers students the chance to perform a polished piece in a non-competitive format for adjudicators. This year, we are pleased to welcome Joseph Fridman, Sandra Roberts and Marg Caspell to Edmonton to work with ESPS students. Find registration forms at our website (edmontonsuzukipiano.ca) or at your teachers' studio. Registration is just \$25 for ESPS students, and the deadline to register is March 22, 2018

2017/2018 EVENTS CALENDAR

February 4, 2018 *Winter Recitals at Alberta College Conservatory*

PCL Hall (5th Floor)

1:00 *Students of Alla Rekhson*

2:45 *Students of Eleanor Tsui*

Bryan Hall (Room 410)

1:00 *Students of Brad Heintzman*

2:00 *Students of Nancy Thornhill*

February 11, 2018 *Winter Recitals at Alberta College Conservatory*

PCL Hall (5th Floor)

12:30 *Students of Rhonda McEachen, Melanie Bodnar, Heather Hindman and Hillary Paul*

2:00 *Students of Tim Eckert*

3:30 *Students of Ruth Johnson*

February 25, 2018 *Winter Recitals at Alberta College Conservatory*

Bryan Hall (Room 410)

12:45 *Students of Gail Olmstead*

1:45 *Students of Tess Brown*

3:15 *Students of Regine Maier*

March 18, 2018 *Graduation Concert at PCL Hall*

April 21, 2018 *Spring Festival at Suzuki Charter School*

May 6, 2018 *Group Concerts at Suzuki Charter School*

June 2, 3 & 10, 2018 *Summer Recitals*

June 17, 2018 *Graduation Concert at Muttart Hall*

CONGRATULATIONS JANUARY GRADUATES

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

Volume 1

Grace Leung

Louis Lu

Branden Mella-Rodriguez

Mia Pedernal

Volume 2

Josiah Li

Dmitry Pavlov

Erin Zapesocki

Volume 3

Alexandra Sychuk

Volume 4

Muskaan Visram

Sara Visram

Volume 6

Charisse Chan

Isaac Chua

“There is no point where we can say, “This is enough.” Always seek finer music, finer performance. Eventually this will change from a learning attitude to a joyful quest which will last throughout our lives.

Dr. Shinichi Suzuki