

a publication of the Denison University Suzuki Program

"Tone is the living soul. Wish for a beautiful sound, a beautiful heart."

--Shinichi Suzuki

Setting the Tone...

Flute Notes:

For a Beautiful Flute Tone, Eat Fish

by Linda Habig

What?? Eat fish for a beautiful flute sound? Last summer (2006), that is exactly what we were urged to do by Toshio Takahashi, the flutist who created the entire Suzuki Flute Method with guidance from Dr. Suzuki. I was among a group of teacher trainers and trainees at the East Tennessee International Suzuki Flute Institute, and we were fortunate to have daily tone development classes with Mr. Takahashi.

During this daily 1 ½ hour class for teachers only, we played and Takahashi exhorted us to make our tone ever more beautiful, with all kinds of instructions and imagery. Almost every day, he advised us that our flute sounds would become rounder, sweeter, and mellower if we'd eat more fish and drink more tea, as the Japanese do. "You Americans, you eat too much beef and drink too much coffee, and your flute sounds are too big and rough", he'd tell us.

More practically, Takahashi worked with us on phrasing, attacks, and intervals, at an advanced level. Following are two examples of his teachings. For note attacks, which is how any given note is started, he urged us to differentiate based on a piece's tempo; for *andante* (slow), imagine a swan swimming; for *moderato*, a dove gently flying; for *allegro* (fast), a swallow swooping and flying quickly. Another example was his effort to have us play intervals with differing tone colors. We were asked to play a second (e.g. from a C to a D) with a "neighborly" feel, a fourth (e.g. from a C up to an F) with a "romantic and loving" sound, a fifth (e.g. from a C up to a G) with a "friendly" tone, and a seventh (e.g. from a C up to a B) with an "adversarial and angry" feel. All of this made us think a lot about tone color and how we produce it.

As all of my flute students know, I believe and

teach that a beautiful tone is the heart and soul of flute playing. Every lesson begins with "tonalization", where we play long tones on many notes, working to create the concept and actuality of beautiful sound, and cement it firmly in our minds and bodies. Resonant, lovely sound on a flute is created through the interplay of quantity and speed of the airstream, the amount of open space inside the mouth, and the position of the lips (embouchure).

Air must be breathed in deeply, and then released back into and across the flute at high speed, in a concentrated stream. For a resonant and full sound, the flutist must maintain an open throat (like a yawn) and lots of space between the top of the mouth and the lower jaw as the released air passes through the mouth. It helps flutists to think of the inside of their mouths being the Grand Canyon, or a big concert hall, where sound echoes and resonates. And equally importantly, the opening in the lips must be small, with the lower lip fully against the flute, so that the lips provide the proper acoustical basis for the air molecules to move and vibrate in and over the flute embouchure opening.

Wouldn't it be nifty if we truly could get a beautiful flute sound, simply by eating salmon tonight, and tuna tomorrow! It's a wonderful image, though, of the peaceable, gentle and beautiful life that a fish lives, deep in the ocean, and how that makes us think about our sound.

P.S. During the intensive and often-tiring week of teacher training, all of us teachers still ran out during the breaks and grabbed cappuccino or coffee – we just didn't tell Mr. Takahashi!

“The kind of tone Dr. Suzuki is after has a clean beginning, shape, and termination.”

--Paul Landenfeld

“Both position and posture have a tremendous effect on sound production.”

--Winifred Crock

Tone study is ongoing:

--when a new instrument is purchased

--when the student goes through a growth spurt

-- when studying a new technique

--when studying a specific musical style (fiddling vs. Bach, for example)

--when playing in a different register (higher or lower on the instrument)

Piano Tone: Rolling along toward a Beautiful Sound

by Maryfrances Kirsh

Producing a sound on the piano is all about hitting the key and making the hammer hit the string at the right speed to set the string into motion. One can hit the key too slowly and the sound is puny –too hard and it sounds obnoxious –just right, and a beautiful tone is born. I bet you’ve seen Book 1 students play a note and then lift their hands up by the wrists in a very exaggerated motion. That’s a roll. This motion helps young students create that beautiful tone by striking the key just right.

A former student with a passion for baseball taught me that rolling on long notes at the piano was like follow-through in batting. If you don’t follow through, the ball lands just short of the pitcher, but if you keep swinging even after you’ve hit the ball, the ball sails over the fence. Keeping the hand in motion after the note is played creates the right speed for the hammer to hit the string, but also acts as a shock absorber, to prevent that obnoxious sound.

As the student grows musically and physically, the motion of the roll becomes more subtle. The student learns that not all notes need a roll and different pianos need rolls of different sizes to make a beautiful tone. The student also learns that the roll prevents tension and can increase stamina in playing as well.

And, the most important reason, as I tell my students: rolling just looks cool.

The Segreto Family’s Reasons for Attending Institute

Shannon's top 5 reasons to attend a summer Suzuki Institute:

1. A chance to be rejuvenated! A week at institute fills my heart with joy and hope for our children's futures. I love the beautiful music, friendly families and challenging yet fun classes.
2. Motivation! A week at Institute motivates my child to keep playing piano for the rest of the summer. (The month of practice getting ready for Institute is pretty good, too.)
3. Talking with the interesting parents who go to Institutes! Fantastic practice ideas and supportive advice from people who are in the trenches.
4. Valuable teaching time! Master class teachers know how to use this special week to fine-tune your child's playing weaknesses. It's amazing what gets accomplished musically and your child feels really great about herself.
5. It's fun! Being around so many smart, creative kids brings out the kid in all of us. Parents laugh and act silly a lot during this week.

Catherine's top 5 reasons to attend a summer Suzuki Institute:

1. Opening day is fun! You earn tickets by playing Suzuki music on your instrument. The tickets are exchanged for prizes. More tickets = nicer prizes. Hint: Visit Mrs. Kirsh's room--she gives out the most tickets.
2. They have dessert at every meal in the cafeteria! Yes, you CAN eat ice cream for breakfast.
3. Playing frisbee on the grass during class breaks with your new friends.
4. Playing piano in class. We squished 8 kids on 1 piano to play Mississippi Hop Frog at the same time!
5. You feel loved. Children are treated with respect and love by all the grown-ups. It's hard to explain but it feels really special. You don't want institute to end and can't wait until next year!

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Wait, Wait... Don't give up NOW!

by Maryfrances Kirsh

Our Mission...

...to create a positive musical learning partnership among faculty, students, and their parents/practice partners by following the philosophical principles and educational methods developed by Dr. Shinichi Suzuki so that children can grow into loving and respectful individuals who will have a positive effect on their world.

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My daughter raised an important question today. "What will Richard do after he finishes Book 8?", she asked. He still has two more years before college. It hasn't occurred to her that she's not that far behind!

10 years ago, we didn't even know there was a Book 8. We were just thankful the minuets stopped at 3! It took us one year to get through the twinkles. Yes, one year –per child! Little did we know we had 7 ½ books to go!

My kids have reached a point where they really like to play the violin. It wasn't always that way, though. The initial coolness of lessons, group, and making new friends wore off quickly and I did have to force them to keep going. It wasn't fun. What parent wants to be the bad guy? It was worth it, though. We don't have those kinds of battles anymore.

We have battles over a different set of obstacles: our activities.

Our family recently participated in the Easter presentation at our church. It was a pretty big deal and required a whole month of long rehearsals. We had to make hard decisions when those rehearsals interfered with lessons, group classes, hanging out with friends, sleep.... It was a great experience for all of us and we felt the time spent with our church family was worth missing the other stuff.

I'm sure you have or will have to make those types of decisions as your family continues on your Suzuki journey. The dance recital or the piano recital? The soccer game or group class? The sleepover or the group performance? That special art class or the prime private lesson time you've had for years? It's very hard. Will the kids miss out on important stuff that will

affect them later in life?

Maybe you're thinking that they've had enough music lessons and it's time to try something else. Maybe you don't think there's enough time to practice adequately and do other activities. Let me take this moment to beg you to reconsider.

Music lessons are just like school. It takes a long time to get from preschool to graduate school. By the time we're in graduate school, we're pretty fluent in our learning style and in the things that make us who we are.

When we began our Suzuki journey, we learned how to hold the instrument or how to sit in rest position. By the last book, we're pretty fluent with our instrument. We've developed our own tone and our own practice style that's just right for us.

It takes years to be comfortable with our instruments. It is a worthwhile investment to keep going –even with all the demands on our time.

I think it's O.K. to choose the dance recital over the piano recital sometimes. I think earning a position on the traveling soccer team is a good reason to miss a few group lessons. (Yes, Kevin, you read that correctly!) Just don't give up on the music. Dance and soccer may just last for a season, but music is a gift that will last a lifetime.

What is after Book 8? More music to learn, bigger tone, playing in orchestras, joining a string quartet, accompanying choirs or friends on their instruments, learning another instrument, learning another style, auditioning for college scholarships....

Don't give up now!

An update on BJ: You'll be happy to know that he is cautiously jumping in the van and is especially fond of impromptu visits to Dr. Prescott's office.

