



Welcome to the latest edition of the ISA Journal. We're pleased to bring you articles and photos about Talent Education activities from around the globe.

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Cover Photo: Students from the University of Tennessee/Knoxville Suzuki program play for the first time in Venezuela.

The world has changed, and everyone is dealing with these changes in a different way. It is significant that teachers and families involved currently in the Suzuki Method around the globe continue to feel a strong sense of belonging and a shared sense of purpose; and also understand where we have been and where we are going as Regional Associations with a common mission. This issue of the ISA Journal spotlights many of the various aspects of the Talent Education movement: its beginnings; its influence on pedagogy, education and science; its present application in our difficult times; and its future expansion into other areas of study, both instrumental and academic.

One hundred years ago, Dr. Suzuki had just arrived in Germany from Japan on his quest for musical training. How could he have known where this quest would eventually lead. And so it is for all of us in our daily practice: Where do these guiding principles of decency, empathy and the pursuit excellence in learning carry us? How do we apply them not just in our instrumental studies, but, as Dr. Suzuki admonished us many times, in our efforts "for the happiness of all children."

He also said many times, "Music can save the world." And those of us involved in this great pursuit should keep that goal for humanity in our sights at all times. "Think globally, act locally." "Bloom where you are planted." "One person can make a difference, and everyone should try."

The coming of a New Year is celebrated in our ISA Regions at various times in the calendar, and with a myriad of customs. ISA wishes all our members the best in the coming year, and the courage to face our choices and challenges with the same intrepid spirit that guided Dr. Suzuki on his life's adventure of discovery.

Allen Lieb Jr.

CEO/ISA

Visit and join the [ISA Facebook SUZUKI™ Teachers](#) page for postings, discussions and questions from Suzuki teachers around the globe.

Visit and like the ISA Facebook page for important announcements about Suzuki events across our Association and the latest developments in all the instrument areas: <https://www.facebook.com/InternationalSuzukiAssociation>

Visit the ISA website at InternationalSuzuki.org for up-to-date news from each Instrument Committee, important announcements and events from Regional Associations, and read past editions of the ISA Journal dating from 1983.



Suzuki™ Special Features in “The STRAD”

The European Suzuki Association is proud to announce that the September issue of 'The STRAD' includes a Suzuki special with extensive coverage of the Suzuki™ Method and its impact on teaching children music across the world. The article 'Suzuki teaching: Every child can' includes interviews with ESA Teachers Annette Costanzi, Kimberley Wong and Kate Conway as well as SAA Teacher Edward Kreitman and former Suzuki student and American Violinist Hilary Hahn.

A second article 'The Suzuki approach to tone: Every tone has a living soul – Shinichi Suzuki' written by ESA Teacher Helen Brunner is also featured where Helen shares her personal stories of working with Dr. Suzuki.



[Suzuki teaching: Every child can](#)

[The Suzuki approach to tone: Every tone has a living soul – Shinichi Suzuki](#)

Whole New Family of Instruments Go SUZUKI™

by Haukur F Hannesson

Meet the Brass Teacher who Helped a Whole New Family of Instruments Go Suzuki™

It is the hottest day in June since 1947 in Sweden and Ann-Marie Sundberg has just come back to her home in southern Stockholm after her morning walk in the nearby park. Although Ann-Marie's day has started early, on the other side of the Atlantic, her brass teacher trainees taking Unit 1 at the Intermountain Suzuki String Institute are still fast asleep.

Zoom, distance learning, camera angles, lighting, "original sound"—yes, Ann-Marie has had to master a whole new vocabulary and technical know-how in the past eighteen months like the rest of us. But who would have thought Ann-Marie could train Suzuki brass teachers in the United States from her living room in Stockholm before the pandemic?

"It has been a journey" Ann-Marie says in an in-person interview. "Challenging but very interesting. And, with some surprises! Perhaps the most notable one is that I can do this and actually enjoy the possibilities this new technology offers."

Why train Suzuki brass teachers from your living room?

"I have known about the Suzuki™ Method for most of my career," Ann-Marie says.

Ann-Marie is a former trumpet player in the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra, brass pedagogy lecturer at the Royal Stockholm College of Music, a published author of several trumpet schools, and successful brass teacher in three countries.

"Many of my violin teacher colleagues were Suzuki teachers and I was always envious of their results and of the work environment that they created with their tools from their Suzuki teacher training," Ann-Marie says. "I wanted this too for my trumpet teaching! However, when I asked, I found out that there was no Suzuki approach for the trumpet or other brass instruments."

That did not stop Ann-Marie. Having played the violin as a second instrument in her youth, she dusted off her old violin and enrolled in one of the first Suzuki teachers' courses given by John Kendall on one of his many visits to Sweden in the early 1980s.

"It was an enriching experience, although, my violin playing did not improve that much! The philosophy, the use and structure of the repertoire, and the emphasis on tone as well as the use of both individual and group lessons were elements which I, as a brass player and teacher, could strongly relate to."

A number of years passed. In Norway, brass players had also been inspired by the other Suzuki instruments. The Association of Norwegian Brass and Wind Bands funded an exploratory project (called Rett på musikken – Right on the Music) to find out whether it was possible to develop something similar for brass instruments. Anne-Berit Halvorsen, a Suzuki violin teacher in Oslo and then Chair of the Norwegian Suzuki Association and Board Member of the European Suzuki Association, was instrumental in getting this started and involving trumpet and trombone teachers in this project.

During a shared airport taxi ride with the writer of this article (who at the time was the Chair of the ESA) to the Annual General Meeting of the European Suzuki Association, Anne-Berit shared her thoughts on the project and emphasized the necessity to steer it towards a more formal "Suzuki" direction by the ESA. A food for thought for the Chair.

How did you get involved with the development of Suzuki trumpet and later all the brass instruments?

"It was all your fault! You were one of my bosses at the time at the Nacka Music School outside Stockholm. One day we were talking in your office and the subject of Suzuki came up. One thing led to another and the end result was that you asked me to be the project manager of this ESA project, which was to develop the SUZUKI™ Method for trumpet," Ann-Marie says.



A number of busy years followed. Ann-Marie was also working as a brass pedagogy lecturer at the Royal Stockholm College of Music at the time and the music college gave her a grant to do research and to start a test group of young children.

Ann-Marie travelled to several countries to observe Suzuki teaching on various instruments and disciplines. At home, she followed a Suzuki teacher training course on the cello while discussing her work with Suzuki teachers and teacher trainers in Europe. "I studied the Suzuki repertoire of a number of instruments, in order to analyse the necessary technical progression needed for the first Suzuki trumpet book. And I looked critically at my own instrument, the trumpet, to see how the instrument and the early stages of learning could be adjusted to a young child of four years old," Ann-Marie says. "All of this was an interesting and challenging journey, which broadened my horizon as to the possibilities of the trumpet."

After a few years of development work, the International Suzuki Association accepted the trumpet as a Suzuki instrument in 2011. This decision was later augmented to include all brass instruments.

"That was a great point," Ann-Marie says. "It was, however, the beginning of a process that has continued and is continuing to this day," she adds. Ann-Marie became a Suzuki teacher trainer in 2013. She started training trumpet teachers in Sweden, and later in Canada, the United States, Mexico, and Brazil. Meanwhile, the first Suzuki Trumpet book was tested and commented on by a large group of trumpet teachers. "I would like to think that although I provided the initial research and 'skeleton' for the books, they are a collaborative effort of all the wonderful teachers who have taken time to play, teach and comment on the books since the beginning," Ann-Marie says.

What has it been like to work on Suzuki Trumpet Book 1?

"A long and arduous but very rewarding process," Ann-Marie says.

Publishing Suzuki ground material is a painstakingly detailed project. The Suzuki books, containing the ground material, are published by Alfred and Ann-Marie has been working tightly with them as well as with the ISA's International Brass Committee, of which Ann-Marie is the Chair.

"I have prior experience in working with a publisher in Sweden when my books on trumpet playing were published, so I knew what to expect," Ann-Marie says. "I am very happy to see that Suzuki Trumpet Book 1 is now on the market, together with the excellent recording of Caleb Hudson, assistant professor of Trumpet at University of North Texas and a member of the Canadian Brass," Ann-Marie adds. She says she is "indebted to my colleagues on the ISA Brass Committee": Natalie DeJong, trumpet faculty at Mount Royal University Conservatory in Calgary, Canada, Astrid Nøkleby, trombone teacher from Oslo, Norway (who also participated in the original Right on the Music project) and Brenda Luchsinger, assistant professor of music (French horn) at Alabama State University, Montgomery, Alabama. "I would like to thank all of them for their great work and dedication."

Are there any particular challenges entailed in adopting the method for brass instruments other than the trumpet?

"The basics are the same," Ann-Marie says. "Fairly soon after the beginning stages, there are, however, some variations in technical development that some of the other brass instruments need to address. Here it can be an issue of keys and in some cases, additional repertoire is needed," Ann-Marie adds. "Most of the repertoire of the first three books can, however, be played by all of the instruments."

What does the future of Suzuki brass look like?

"We now are 91 Suzuki brass teachers in 21 countries, the latest being Argentina and Thailand, and we are a strong dedicated international community," Ann-Marie says. "I will not be around forever to spread the word, but I will make the utmost effort to do so in order to see the future of Suzuki brass secured. I want to reiterate, however, that I see Suzuki brass as a collective project belonging not only to all Suzuki brass teachers but to the Suzuki community as a whole."

"It is the responsibility of the entire Suzuki brass community to make sure that the quality of tone and the quality of teaching continues," Ann-Marie says. "It is also our collective responsibility that Suzuki brass is available for children and that their teachers have the opportunity to train as Suzuki brass teachers, thereby gaining the teaching tools necessary to pass the joy of brass playing to their students."

"After all, Dr. Suzuki said that 'Tone has the Living Soul.' I know I am biased, but what is more beautiful than the full rich tone of a brass instrument!? I want children all over the world to have the possibility of experiencing this and hope that the Suzuki community will continue to make that happen."

It is now late afternoon for Ann-Marie in Stockholm. The lights are on, the laptop is on, the two cameras are positioned. Zoom is updated (very important) and opened to the right meeting.

“Good morning, everyone!” Ann-Marie says to the smiling faces in all of the small Zoom rectangles. “I hope you have all had a good night’s sleep. Now we continue where we ended yesterday.”

And, through the wonders of technology, Unit 1 Suzuki Brass teacher training course continues. Next week it will be Unit 2 at Mount Royal University Conservatory, in Calgary, Canada.

This article was first published in the SAA Journal in August 2021

About the author:

Haukur F. Hannesson holds a PhD and an MA in Arts Policy and Management from the City University in London, UK. He also holds an AGSM in Cello Performance and Teaching from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. Haukur was one of the first Suzuki cello teachers in Europe and holds the Diploma of the ESA (Level 5). He is a recognized Suzuki teacher trainer by the ESA, SAA and ARSA. At the beginning of his professional life, Haukur was a cellist in the Iceland Symphony Orchestra and in 1988 founded the Reykjavik Suzuki School of Music, in Iceland. After moving to Sweden in 1994, Haukur was the CEO of two professional Swedish orchestras as well as deputy director for the Nacka Music School, outside Stockholm. In recent years he has been teaching cello and conducting student orchestras in the city of Västerås, Sweden, where he now lives with his husband of 27 years. Haukur has published a number of research articles on the subject of arts policy and music pedagogy in scholarly journals and was the Chair and Deputy-Chair of the ESA for a decade and a half. He was on the Board of Directors of the ISA for 16 years, serving as Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary and Treasurer.

Give a Child a Teacher 2021 — 100 days Practice Challenge

Give a Child a Teacher is a special Fundraising Campaign organised by the European Suzuki Association (ESA) each year to raise funds to give more children the opportunity of a SUZUKI™ education in Europe, Middle East and Africa.

This year, Guillem Calvo, Suzuki™ Violin Teacher, organised a special 100 days Practice Challenge to raise funds through sponsorship.



'Talent Education, for the happiness of all children'
Dr Shinichi Suzuki

The ESA asked all teachers throughout the region to organise 100 days of sponsored practice with their students by asking them to -

- Commit to practice daily for 100 days, starting in January and finishing by 2 May 2021.
- Have fun practising and visit Guillem's website for some practice tips!
- Get sponsorship from parents, family and friends for each day of practice or a total sum for the 100 days.
- Send a photo or a video of a practice to include in the celebratory compilation video posted on the ESA website.

Teachers from all over the ESA region, and from other regions too, got involved and committed to 100 days of sponsored practice with their students. Their efforts were supported by regular videos recorded by Guillem giving tips, thoughts and encouragement to all the children participating in this big challenge.

Parents, family and friends were all very generous with their sponsorship and together **raised over £5,000 for Give a Child a Teacher!**

This money was donated to the SUZUKI™ Teaching Trust (STT) which is a charity concerned with making SUZUKI™ Teaching in music available to children in Europe, Middle East and Africa.

The STT do this by giving financial support to SUZUKI™ Teacher Training projects in countries where there is a need.

The STT have helped to give Suzuki™ Teachers to children in Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonai, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, South Africa, Turkey, Ukraine, and Zimbabwe.

A Message from Una Lauw, President Suzuki Talent Education Association Singapore (STEAS).

We are at the end of 2021 and we are still living with Covid, albeit with evolving policies and ever-changing restrictions. It's been a tough year for all and these changes have also impacted in-person lessons... But life goes on. We adapt and emerge stronger.

For our teachers and parents, I would like to share a quote from Albert Camus on resilience: "Sometimes carrying on, just carrying on, is the superhuman achievement."

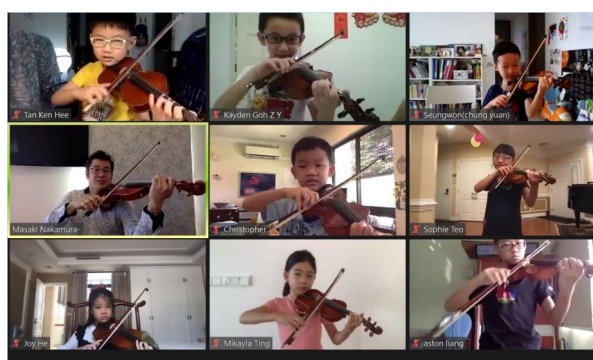
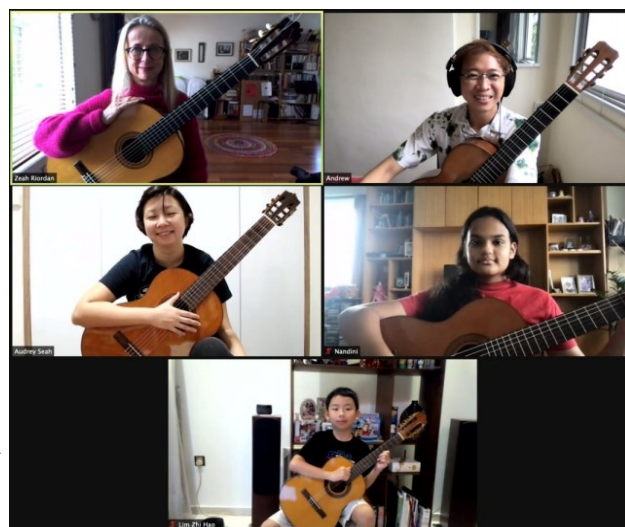


STEAS Funtasy Camp 2021

Singapore's National Suzuki Camp

Our Annual Suzuki Camp took place from the 6th to 9th August 2021 on Zoom. It started on Friday 6th August with the piano students session with Teacher Kasia calling from The United Kingdom. On the following days, Teacher Masaki and Teacher Zeah conducted sessions for the violin and guitar students respectively, calling in from Australia.

The 3 trainers whole heartedly gave their best to engage our students. Despite the differences in time zone, culture, and the limitation of an online platform, they managed the online classes really well, communicated clearly on learning objectives and ensured that no one was left behind. There were appropriate responses from the students and the occasional laughter indicated that they appreciated the classes and really were really engaged.



On the final day of the online camp, Teacher Zeah conducted a parent talk on 2 main topics; "The (He)Art of Listening" and "Wearing the Parent Hat". We had 23 parents of piano students, 20 parents from violin students, 3 parents from cello students, 3 parents from guitar students with 19 teachers tuning in to participate in Teacher Zeah's parent talk. The talk was an enriching and comprehensive one which lasted for 3 hours on the morning of 9th August. Teacher Zeah shared generously on her years of experience in teaching the Suzuki™ method.

The camp concluded with a concert put up by participants of the camp. Teacher Annette was the host and the participants took turns to perform "live" over Zoom. This performance allowed students to showcase their abilities which they developed during the camp and also gave them the opportunity to listen to their friends on other instruments too. We'd like to Thank all parents for supporting their children's musical development during this pandemic year and their openness to accepting Zoom as an alternative platform for Suzuki workshops. We'd also like to Thank our trainers; Teachers Kasia, Masaki and Zeah for accepting this invitation to conduct this workshop. Your effort towards this event is much appreciated and it goes a long way their musical interest.

ARSA / STEAS Teacher's Assessment

Due to the global Covid pandemic, ARSA started online training programmes in January to ensure that training of existing Suzuki teachers continues. Online Suzuki teachers' assessment for the Asian region has also been in place since June this year. STEAS had our 1st online violin teachers' assessment with Dr Lan Ku Chen in December and will be conducting our 1st online piano teachers' assessment in January 2022. Teacher's assessment is an important exam towards teaching excellence. The process of preparing for this assessment deepens understanding of pedagogy and promotes reflection on how we approach teaching.



Teacher Una during online teacher's assessment with Dr Lan Ku Chen



Teaching demonstration with a student of Teacher Una

Online Teacher Gatherings in 2021

ARSA strives to build a cohesive collegial relationship among teachers to journey together in providing quality musical education to our students and to build a vibrant local Suzuki community.

We conducted 3 teacher's gathering on Zoom this year and encouraged teachers to attend. It's always difficult to find an ideal time and day to accommodate every teacher's schedule. We are now blessed to conduct meetings on Zoom which has solved travelling and venue challenges.

Although Zoom cannot replace the complete human interaction, we managed to share our opinions on common teaching concepts and played some games to know each other better.

On one occasion, Teacher Wen Bin prepared a musical quiz on guessing the genre, piece, composer and performers which deepens general musical knowledge. On another occasion, we played "truth or lie" on Zoom which was a simple & effective way to guess about each other's favorite food, hobby, pastime, facts and quirkiness.

Friendship among teachers are important to develop trust and understanding which would be essential when we organize events together. We look forward to physical meet ups in 2022!

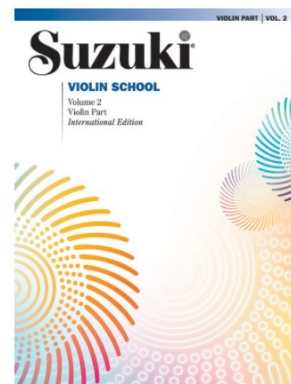


A Suzuki Violin Teacher Experience in Book 2 Online Training

This year, I've had an amazing opportunity to take part in the Suzuki Book 2 online teacher training (Violin) with Dr. Chen & Mrs. Chen, and my fellow teachers in the region. Over the 8-week session, I was able to gain a new perspective of playing and teaching Book 2. As a Suzuki student myself since the age of 6, I have been exposed to different teachings of the same pieces, which contributes greatly to my growth as a Suzuki teacher even now.

Compared to in-person courses, the pace of teaching and learning is much more relaxed – that isn't to say it is slow! I found it more effective to take the weekend after the session to review, practice, and digest the techniques discussed in class. With more time, you can understand the content better, and are then able to perform better for our students

As we know, the technical difficulties of conducting an online course at home are abundant. Weak Internet connection, terrible audio, interrupting family members... However, barring the occasional internet issues, the course was conducted rather smoothly, as everyone was co-operative and did their best to work with our tools, given the circumstances. It was also great to meet fellow Suzuki teachers from other countries – I felt that we are not alone and that we have a supportive community to keep the learning going. All in all, it was a very valuable experience and well worth the effort to take part in!



TERI's Joint Research with the University of Tokyo



Music on the brain. The four musical properties controlled to introduce errors into the piece of music were pitch (how high a note is), tempo (how fast notes are played), stress (how strong a note is) and articulation (how notes are structured). The researchers found that a good sense of tempo was significant for the Suzuki group. Image: evanlat/evanlat with permission.

TERI's joint research with the University of Tokyo on music on the brain has finally been published, and a press conference was held by the authors of the paper, Professor Kuniyoshi L. Sakai of the University of Tokyo and TERI President Dr. Ryugo Hayano, a professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo, on December 24, 2021, at the TERI Tokyo Office.

The paper is titled "Music-Experience-Related and Musical-Error-Dependent Activations in the Brain" and published from Oxford Academic. Dr. Miyamae, the Special Professor of the TERI Flute Department and Doctor of Medicine, is among the authors of the paper.

The experiment was conducted on 98 secondary school students. The joint research team classified the students into three groups by their levels of music experience, including the group of students who were trained from a young age in the Suzuki method. The research team used magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to study the brains of the students during a task focused on musical observation, and found that students trained to play music from a young age exhibited certain kinds of brain activity more strongly than other students. They also observed a specific link between musical processing and areas of the brain associated with language processing. Those who would like to learn more about this experiment can read the paper at the Oxford Academic website for free.

This is the first time that brain science has shown the effectiveness of the Suzuki Method, a music education method based on ideas of natural language acquisition.

The Sakai Laboratory at the University of Tokyo will continue to pursue the elucidation of the mechanisms of language, music and creativity in the human brain, and we, TERI, will continue to contribute to deepen exchanges with people around the world through our practical activities in music education.

Reference links:

Press Release on the Univ. of Tokyo website

https://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/focus/en/press/z0508_00201.html

The Research Paper on Oxford Academic

<https://academic.oup.com/cercor/advance-article/doi/10.1093/cercor/bhab478/6479786>



Memories of a Trip to Caracas

In the late 1960s, the University of Tennessee/Knoxville Suzuki program was enjoying a group lesson of the advanced students one Friday afternoon when they were interrupted by a group of visitors touring the University campus who heard the “wonderful music” coming from the music hall. It turned out that this group was from the Tennessee-Venezuela Partnership, and included a well-known operatic soprano from Caracas. She said, when introduced, “This is a fantastic group of young players! You need to come to tour Venezuela!” This remark resulted in students from the Knoxville program being on the stage, many months later, in June 1971, of the Teatro Municipal in Caracas with the Venezuelan Symphony.

The performance received a sensational reception. The audience stood cheering for at least five minutes. The students, stunned by the applause, came back on the stage again and again. Unfortunately the person videotaping the concert neglected to turn on the sound, and there exists only a silent video. Fortunately however, Israel Peña, the chief music critic of EL UNIVERSAL, the leading newspaper of Caracas, was in the audience and published the following review:

“A great surprise was the presentation of the ‘Grupo Suzuki’ of the University of Tennessee under the direction of the great north American maestro and educator, William Starr. This is a group of children who play the violin with perfect musicality, perfect bowing, and the impact of professional violinists. And what did they play? Beautiful and popular melodies of the pre-classic, of the romantic classicism, in a perfect style, thus offering us a lesson and a clear example of a new method applied to any child, a method of natural assimilation. We congratulate those who have allowed us to see a new phase, a new panorama of musical teaching.”



Betsy Fee was one of the students in the first tour group to Caracas. She has been kind enough to share some photos and recollections:

In life, one can look back and identify one or two defining moments that shaped their future. The tour group to Caracas Venezuela was one of those moments for me. While many of the details are faint, I captured the essence of the experience. I do remember the practice prep work, the travel, meeting new people, performing, experiencing the culture and all that it offered, all while doing so with my music friends. However what strikes me most is the lasting, more important life lessons. The love of other cultures stands out to me as well as the love traveling.

To see another country at such a young age opened my eyes to other possibilities beyond my own. In addition, I learned that persistent practice pays off which was the beginning of my decision to choose music as my life's passion. That persistence is a life skill that has served me well in other areas of my life. It opened my eyes to the concept of life long learning and being open to other interpretations which makes my studio and institute teaching so rewarding.

Recently I was visiting with my teacher Hiroko and she reminded me that as we were touring I started to cry as I saw homeless children begging in the streets. We discussed how it made both of us feel. After our conversation it made me realize that I carried that memory home with me and to this day have developed and implemented skills to help the less fortunate in small ways. So as I look back, I owe a debt of gratitude to William Starr and Carlos Riazuelo for shaping my life in to what it is today, a life filled with the joy of learning and endless possibilities.



About the author:

Mrs. Betsy Fee is a native of Knoxville, Tennessee where she was a student of the Suzuki Method under the direction of William J. Starr who is one of the founding fathers of Suzuki in the United States. She received her Bachelors of Music Performance from the University of Tennessee where she was a member of the Gamma Beta Phi Society. She then continued her graduate and Suzuki pedagogy studies with William Starr and Hiroko Driver.

After her graduate studies, she taught at Carson Newman University where she was an adjunct teacher and started the first Suzuki program at CNU. Betsy also taught as a Suzuki instructor at the University of Tennessee.

Betsy now lives in Greenville, S.C. where she has had a private studio for over 30 years and currently plays in many regional orchestras including the ASO, GCO, GSO, HSO, and the KSO. Betsy was former principal second violin with the GSO and KSO. She has done extensive studio recording work and church music as well as performed with artists such as Rod Stewart, Smokey Robinson, and Mannheim Steamroller.

As a sought after clinician for institutes and workshops, Betsy has taught in North Carolina, Tennessee, South Carolina, Alabama, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, Virginia, Florida, Texas, Georgia, Kentucky, and Ohio. She also serves on the Board of Directors for SASC.

Betsy lives with her husband Charles and their rather active dog Rowdy.

Personal and Community Growth During the Pandemic

By Lani Bortfeld

The Suzuki Talent Education Partnership (STEP) in Springfield, MA, USA, is a multigenerational interfaith music ministry whose mission is to combine high-quality music instruction, accessible to all, with outreach to and in partnership with the Greater Springfield community through free family-friendly concerts, instrument loans and its scholarship fund. It is STEP's vision that students of diverse ages, genders, backgrounds and cultures will thrive by experiencing the joy of making music together using Shinichi Suzuki's step-by-step approach - where teachers, students and families work and learn together in an environment nurtured by love.

Now in its twentieth year, STEP has continued its mission to give need-based financial aid and loan string instruments to string students in the Greater Springfield/Northern CT area, where only the suburban towns of Longmeadow MA and its neighboring town across the state line, Enfield CT, have free public school string programs open to all students. STEP could not provide this outreach without the generosity of its mission partners through the years - our family organization, the Springfield Suzuki Partnership (SSP), area churches, and community supporters in Greater Springfield and Northern Connecticut. STEP has been hosted by six different churches over the years, and each move has been a challenge that led to more growth, either in numbers, in accessibility to the community we serve, or in alignment with the church's mission focus. These moves were good preparation for the current pandemic, during which we have continued to learn and grow together, and this year our theme is, appropriately, "Personal Growth".



We are based at South Congregational Church in Springfield MA, a diverse city of 154,000 an hour and 45 minutes west of Boston. Our 2019 book 1 class is pictured above at South Church, whose generosity allows STEP to make nominal utility payments in lieu of rent for this classroom space, a vital component to keeping STEP costs low and scholarship opportunities available. In addition, STEP again was blessed by a generous donation in from South Church's Benevolence Fund along with a first-time donation from St. Mark's Episcopal for financial aid, and the Congregational Church of Somersville (CT) Missions Board made a contribution to help maintain our instrument lending library. This support is particularly important for students of color, who are traditionally under-represented in professional orchestras and chamber ensembles. STEP's Fund and the SSP have helped our program to be a welcoming place for families from all over the globe.



The fact that STEP was able to continue giving concerts throughout this pandemic is due to the selfless efforts of not only STEP's families, but many others in the community. When South Congregational remained closed to groups, we had classes in students' backyards and homes, Pastor Graham Van Keuren, and the Congregational Church of Somersville welcomed STEP to their space, making it possible for us to livestream not only last year's benefit concert for the Open Pantry, photo below, which is Springfield's resource for the food-insecure, but also STEP's October 2020 Open House. STEP students and parents stepped up to the mic to talk about our program in a video which you can still view on the STEP Suzuki Strings Facebook page. We were also able to record the pieces for our annual interfaith holiday sing-along in Somersville, where the Rev. Eric Elley produced our concert video which is still up on the Springfield Library's Facebook page, thanks to librarian Matthew Jaquith.



Our Parent/Teacher Organization, the SSP, has been key to our endurance and perseverance. The SSP has defined STEP's core value as *valuing all kinds of diversity, and celebrating commitment, accomplishment, respect and confidence, in a nurturing atmosphere which allows teachers, students and families to struggle, evolve & grow, in learning as in life*. The SSP sets program goals for the year, supports parents and families in their musical and personal goals through meetings centered on parent topics; organizes and coordinates fundraising efforts for the STEP Scholarship and Instrument fund; helps teachers with a myriad of concert details including selling tickets and soliciting donations; and organizes social events like our September Welcome-Back potluck supper and annual meeting at South Church in 2019, concert receptions, school vacation week get-togethers, and field trips to inspiring live concerts which we hope will resume in 2022.

Getting through the past 22 months together has bonded us in a way that has made us a better team. From March to May 2020 we had weekly 20-minute SSP check-ins to keep in touch and share joys and concerns. When we came out of lockdown, we made the decision together to have a livestreamed, masked and socially distanced benefit concert at the smaller Congregational Church of Somersville since South Church was not yet open to the public. We had just three student soloists and the STEP quartet, pictured below, perform to benefit the Open Pantry of Springfield rather than our own scholarship and instrument fund. Too many people in our community were hurting; we needed to reach out beyond our immediate needs, like so many others did during the spring of 2020.



Our November 2020 SSP meeting focused on our yearly theme of “empathy” as we shared stories of how we personally faced some of life’s biggest challenges. Many STEP families have endured difficult times in their countries of origin, and struggled to make the journey and then the transition to life in the U.S.



Others have struggled with racism, special needs children and issues with their own parents that make parenting their children more challenging. We didn’t solve our problems, but it was a very special evening together that helped us keep in touch when we had to go back to remote meetings, lessons and classes after Thanksgiving 2020. In December 2020, again with the help of Reverends Van Keuren and Elley, we successfully filmed our annual Inter-faith Holiday Singalong for the Springfield City Library to post on their Facebook account.

As part of STEP’s ongoing commitment to diversity, in 2021 we focused on music with African roots. Well-known gospel and jazz musician Kevin Sharpe, left, the father of STEP student Kadence, taught the STEP trio about the blues and improvisation over Zoom during January and February. Then in early spring 2021 the SSP decided to present the 31st annual Suzuki String Serenade benefit concert, SSP’s main fundraiser, in May as a hybrid event with limited in-person seating along with a paid livestream event on Facebook. South Church was still closed to groups, so once again Rev. Elley was key in making STEP’s concert happen by locating a new venue - St.

Mark’s Episcopal Church in East Longmeadow, MA. There we held a successful hybrid benefit concert: a wonderful mix of classical, jazz, fiddle and folk-songs and solos, including student soloists chosen by audition and my performance of Bloch’s *Abodah*, in honor of those we had lost to COVID. The jazz pieces, Erskine Hawkins’ *Tuxedo Junction* and Bert Ligon’s arrangement of Gershwin’s *Summertime* from *Porgy and Bess*, were the hits of the concert thanks to Mr. Sharpe’s coaching.

STEP is also indebted once again to its good friend Anne-Gerard Flynn, whose great article on Masslive spread the word about STEP’s mission and May benefit concert: <https://www.masslive.com/entertainment/2021/05/annual-suzuki-string-serenade-plannedfor-east-longmeadow.html>

A big blessing was that South Church was open but as you all know, planning in the time of COVID is an exercise in flexibility and resourcefulness. STEP had to wait until two weeks before the event to decide if we'd have it hybrid or all virtual, due to COVID. This made publicity so much more challenging, and no one attended the open house in person. However, the process of recording the open house was so good for all the students and gave us a good foundation on which to build for the 2021-22 year. You can watch the open house on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8Quxai-tWk>.



The Masked Musicians of the 31st Annual Suzuki String Serenade fundraiser, May 2021.

Last December the library was closed to patrons, so we recorded the concert in Somersville as mentioned above. This year the library was open, but needed to limit the audience to family members due to social distancing requirements. So, once again we recorded a concert video, this time at Springfield's newest branch library in East Forest Park where our friend Matthew Jaquith is now supervisor. Through him we were able to connect with Springfield Focus, the local cable access channel, and they recorded and edited the video which you can view on the library's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/SpringfieldCityLibrary/videos/606527947305231>.



The STEP Suzuki Strings perform O Come Little Children

Our plans for next year will be affected by the limitations of the pandemic, but we've hung tough throughout and continue to count our blessings and deepen our connections to one another and to the music we make together. We send love and greetings from New England to all of you around the world, with prayers for a healthy and fulfilling 2022.



<https://internationalsuzuki.org/>