



THE SUZUKI MASTER CLASS

What is it?

Master class provides one-on-one time with a master teacher. Each master class usually has only 4 or 5 students, providing 10-15 minutes per child for individual instruction with the teacher and the rest of the hour for observation.

What does the student play?

During the Master class, the student will be asked to play a memorized, polished piece. (A polished piece must be performed fluently from memory with correct notes, fingering, dynamics, bowing, and style.)

What do the other students do?

When not playing for the teacher, students listen while others receive individual attention, learning from peer observation. The teacher may ask the others to write an observation or listen for something specific while the other student is playing.

What does the teacher focus on?

The master teacher teaches a one-point mini-lesson, using the polished piece as a means of instruction on ways to specifically improve the level of the student's playing and refine aspects of their technique, musicianship and musicality. This is not effective when working on their newest piece. They should never begin to learn a new piece in a master class. They learn to make their polished piece even better. When you see the amazing things that can happen in a one-day master class, you might really enjoy a week-long music camp or summer Suzuki Institute where you have an entire week of intensive and inspiring work in the master class. Many students can reach entirely new levels of performance this way.

What is Suzuki's "One Point Teaching"?

Choose one point (whether it is tone, posture, bow hold, rhythm, dynamics, phrasing, style, articulation, etc.) and continue to work on that point in the master class or over the course of an institute or workshop week to allow the student to develop in-depth knowledge and thorough mastery of that one point.

"Suzuki teachers employ the concept of one-point teaching. We will focus on only one technique at a time, temporarily overlooking others so that we do not overwhelm the child with instructions about several different things at once."

~Ed Kreitman, Western Springs School of Talent Education

**“Choose One Point”, said Dr. Shin’ichi Suzuki
to William Primrose, in Matsumoto, Japan, 1976
reported by Armena Marderosian, June 10, 2006**

It was 1976. We teachers were at Dr. Shin’ichi Suzuki’s Talent Education/Ability Development Institute (Saino Kyoiku Kaikan) at 3-10-3 Fukushima, Matsumoto, Nagano-ken, Japan. The famous violist William Primrose was giving a masterclass in the concert hall, and was to hear and teach several violin students, one after another. A student was to play the Chaconne from the Bach Partita No. 2 in D Minor for solo violin.

William Primrose became upset on stage, and said irritably something like, “How can I possibly teach the Chaconne in such a short time?” We in the audience listened in hushed silence to know what would happen next.

Dr. Suzuki calmly, assuredly, gave to William Primrose the important teacher training principle that he’d been teaching to teachers and parents for many years in his lessons, talks and writings. Dr. Suzuki quietly told him, “Choose one point.”

We were all amazed, amazed that this insight from Dr. Suzuki, which he’d been insisting to us teachers was the way to progress, would be the same message to the world famous violinist who had come all the way from Australia to teach Suzuki’s teacher trainees. What a great lesson for us all. Lucky that Suzuki lessons are OPEN lessons, so we can learn from each other’s lessons!

Suzuki was an astute observer of how humans learn, and of their psychology. A person can pay attention to just one new point at a time. And will make progress when allowed to focus on this one point fully (not distracted by other points). The teacher decides which of the many problems will be the one best to fix first, to best set the stage for a next point to be fixed, and a next. We Americans at first maybe didn’t believe Dr. Suzuki’s assignments, assuming if he said to practice a point 10,000 times, he said it like an American might make an exaggeration to do something a million times, to underline it humorously, but not meaning literally 10,000 times. The Japanese teacher trainees seemed to understand when Dr. Suzuki assigned their “one point”, saying, “Practice this 10,000 times”. They would actually figure out how many times they’d have to do it each day in order to have done it, consciously and carefully, 10,000 times by their next lesson. They would “get ready” and “go” to do the point; maybe it was a bow circle. Haruko Kataoka, co-founder of the Suzuki Piano Method, said we need to practice a skill the right way three times more than we ever did it the old way. Then the body will serve up the desired way. (If we do something the old way many times, then try and try to get it “right”, and finally get it “right” once, and stop, the body will still draw on its old way of larger experience, even when the mind knows the new way is “better”).

Dr. Suzuki could see if the next lesson showed the students had changed in their ability. DOING it is the way to change ability, to give the body a higher ability. KNOWING how to do it, but not actually DOING it does not change the body’s ability. This was a distinction Dr. Suzuki taught, the distinction between “knowledge” and “ability”, the knowing in the mind, and the doing of the body.

The teacher notices everything, and then decides which point matters the most, and shows the student how to do it during the lesson. The teacher practices with the student at the lesson to have them do it “right”. Then the student needs to practice the one point many times in home practice to build the ability surely into their technique.

Dr. Suzuki said, “Choose one point!”