The Basic Keys to Suzuki Violin Lessons

There is no better way to start violin lessons than with the Suzuki method. Dr. Shinichi Suzuki developed a method of teaching this difficult instrument to young children at a time when only the talented would have dared to take violin lessons. It was only as word spread from Japan that something special was going on there that Americans began to study with Suzuki to learn his method. It seems genius. And yet, it has so much common sense to it. The University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music lists Suzuki's 10 Keys which are excellent for a basic understanding of the method.

10 Keys of the Suzuki violin method

1. **Begin early**- Suzuki instruction can begin as early as 2 1/2. During these early years children love repetition and learning new skills. They love to show their parents what they are learning over and over again.

2. **Learn by aural memory**- Based on Suzuki's idea that children easily learn their "mother tongue," the Suzuki method relies on the children listening to the recordings daily of the music that they will play. The child will learn to play the piece by imitating what he or she heard and by copying the teacher.

3. **Creative repetition**- Suzuki arranged the pieces to be played so that each piece taught a technique. As a child progresses through the pieces and books, he or she adds onto the skills learned in earlier pieces. Unlike some musical instruction, in Suzuki a piece is not forgotten, but reviewed often so that skills remain intact.

4. **Active memory of all pieces learned**- Group class is an excellent time to play old pieces and to play them with other children. That is the child's motivation to keep reviewing—he or she will play that song again with the group. They don't want to be the one left out of the puzzle during group class.

5. **Reading after physical control**- The violin is a very challenging instrument to play. There are no keys to press as on a piano. A child has to know where on the fingerboard to place fingers, but is not guided by "keys." Therefore, in the Suzuki method, we hold off on reading notes until tone, intonation, and posture are perfected.

6. **Parent education**- The parent who is going to work with the child attends every lesson and group class with his or her child. In the beginning lessons of very young students, most communication is between parent and teacher. The Suzuki teacher continuously works with the parent who must carry through on practice at home. Taking notes during class is a key role for parents so that they remember what to do and how. As the child gets older, the teacher will give more responsibility to the student. The role of the parent is what makes this method unique: in early years the parent is engaged with the child during practice instead of the child going off to practice alone. This is a parent-child activity.

7. **Encouragement**- Just as a parent would not scold his or her infant for mispronouncing a word, but smile and repeat the correct word for the baby, the Suzuki parent never scolds, but only encourages the young child as learning takes place. What fun it is to learn when mom or dad is smiling and encouraging especially when the violin is such a difficult instrument to play. The sense of accomplishment, when done right, brings the same joy to a child as learning new words that mom and dad rejoice over.
8. **Step by step mastery**- In the very early stages, the steps to the bow hold and violin hold are small and repeated until the muscle memory is strengthened. In that same way, other skills and technique are taught through the repertoire, not through exercises. As each piece is played, new skills are introduced and rehearsed until they become automatic.

9. **Listening to recordings** - Because Suzuki observed that learning one's native language, or mother tongue, occurs through hearing and repetition, he concluded that a child could learn to play the violin through the same method. The more the child heard a good violinist play, the more opportunity the child would have of playing that same piece well. Suzuki firmly stated that beautiful music must be played in the home for a child to internalize it.

10. **Every child can learn**- Perhaps the most exciting part of Suzuki's idea is that all children can learn to play the violin and play it at a high level. He didn't reserve this privilege to those who seemed gifted. He said, "Every child can!"

Source: The University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music

[http://ccm.uc.edu/prep/music/suzuki/history.html](http://ccm.uc.edu/prep/music/suzuki/history.html)

Thanks for coming to the Davenport Suzuki Violin School. [www.suzukidavenport.com](http://www.suzukidavenport.com)

You can read a more in-depth explanation of the 10 Keys at the UC site.

Eric