

## LISTENING – THE VITAL INGREDIENT

A Suzuki teacher I know often says that ‘Suzuki’ is like a recipe. Just like a cake does, ‘Suzuki’ needs all of the ingredients included if it is to be a success! That is a good analogy. Dr Suzuki encouraged us to create a nurturing environment which would guarantee the success of every student. He agreed that some students adapt more quickly than others within this environment, but the outcome for each can be success.

Just like our cake recipe’s list of ingredients, the ingredients of a positive Suzuki experience are clearly set out. Here are some of them:

An early beginning, good listening habits, parent involvement, a well-qualified teacher who has good rapport with the parent and student, a good quality instrument, lots of praise, consistent practice, performing for others.

However, there is one which works as ‘magically’ as does baking powder in our cake recipe so I am going to single it out. It is:

### *Listening to the recordings!*

I have always known and believed this, so why was I surprised when one of my students, whose brother was already a Suzuki piano student when he was born, decided to try to find the note of the next piece in the repertoire when at a lesson one day – I think it was Bach’s Musette from Volume 2 - and he played every single note of the right hand without hesitation. It was one of my teaching’s golden moments! I have heard so many stories like this. Having often taught the third sibling in a family, I know that listening to so many repetitions of both the recording and the others practicing or at lessons has made their learning so easy. There is never any hesitation when it comes to correct notes and rhythms. Even the dynamic nuances and the articulation seem to almost ‘just happen’. Unfortunately many of our students do not have the luxury of being the next child in the family – most are the first to learn the instrument, so the best we can do is to **play that recording!** Sheila Warby, Suzuki teacher from Sydney, has good advice. She says that the best finger exercise for parents is to **press that start button!**

There is a moment in the film ‘Nurtured by Love’ which I love – a little Japanese boy is riding his tricycle and playing in the sand-pit, and strapped to his back is a cassette player. Now there’s a good idea. Certainly it seems that the younger the age of the child when the listening begins, the more effective the listening. However, any time is a good time – bath time, tea-time, wake-up time, going to sleep time, driving in the car time – for Suzuki listening. If the recording can be played for 3 hours a day the results will speak for themselves. The music does not have to be obtrusive, just audible. Sometimes it is referred to as ‘wallpaper music’.

Other listening can be more directed, for example it can be danced to, drawn or painted to or used along with percussion instruments or body percussion. Small sections of the pieces can be listened to over and over again if there are any problems. The current new piece can be set on ‘repeat’ and played many times. At bed time it is good to advance the recording to the current piece so that it is heard before the child goes to sleep.

Even more specific listening can take place when the student is able to work with the score. Press that repeat button, sit with the score and pencil in anything helpful.

I often say to the older students, “Do you want to learn quickly or slowly?” The answer is usually “quickly”! Then, I say to them, **listen lots!**

Unfortunately students are not aware of the amazing benefits of listening, even although they can sing TV commercials, and songs they hear frequently without really knowing how they do. (Ah, but **we know!**) So even when the students are perfectly capable of pressing that start button themselves, doing so continues to be the parent’s responsibility. Perhaps by the time they are 15 or 16 they will do it for themselves!

So, why not play those Suzuki recordings and enjoy them. The music is beautiful. Do not limit your listening to the current book, but enjoy the beautiful music that awaits you.