# The Suzuki Approach

The Suzuki approach, based on the so-called "mother-tongue" method, differs from traditional methods of teaching instrumental music because it involves the student at a very early age, thus necessitating much participation on the part of the parent (usually the mother) in the role of home-teacher. Some of the basic principles and ingredients of the Suzuki approach are:

1 **Begin as early as possible.** Dr. Suzuki recommends that ability development begins at birth. Formal training may be started by age 3.

2 **Move in small steps** so the child can master the material with a total sense of success, thereby building his confidence and enthusiasm for learning. Each child progresses at his own pace.

3 Either the **mother** or father **attends all lessons** so that (s)he understands the learning process, and can feel secure when working with the child as home-teacher. To this end, the parent receives initial instruction in correct playing posture and all of the beginning steps including the playing of a simple piece. The most important single ingredient for success is the parent's willingness to devote regular time to work closely with the child and the teacher.

4 **Daily listening to recordings** of the Suzuki repertoire, as well as good music in general, is the nucleus of the Suzuki approach. The more the student listens to his records and tapes, the more quickly he learns. This approach derives from the way all normal children learn to speak their native language.

5 **Postpone music reading** until the child's aural and instrumental skills are well established, just as we teach children to read a language only after they can speak. This enables the main focus of the teacher's and student's attention to be on the sound; beautiful tone, accurate intonation, and musical phrasing then become a basic part of the student's earliest training.

6 **Follow** the Suzuki **repertory sequence**, for the most part, so that each piece becomes a building block for the careful development of technique. Equally important is the strong motivation this standardized repertoire provides; students want to play what they hear other students play. Constant repetition of the old pieces in a student's repertoire is the secret of the performing ability of Suzuki students.

7 **Create** in lessons and home practice an **enjoyable learning environment,** so that much of the child's motivation comes from enthusiasm for learning and desire to please. When working with children we should remember Dr. Suzuki's exhortation that we must come "down to their physical limitations and up to their sense of wonder and awe."

8 **Group lessons,** in addition to private lessons, and **observation** of other students' lessons are valuable **aids to motivation.** The child learns from advanced students and from his peers possibly more than he does from his adult teacher directly — children love to do what they see other children do.

9 **Foster an attitude of cooperation** not competition among students, of supportiveness for each other's accomplishments.

## Developing the Whole Child

The Suzuki approach deals with much more than teaching a child how to play an instrument. It seeks to develop the whole child, to help unfold his natural potential to learn and become a good and happy person. The purpose of Suzuki training is not to produce great artists, but to help every child to find the joy that comes through music-making. Through the Suzuki growing process, children thrive in a total environment of support: they develop confidence and self-esteem, determination to try difficult things, self-discipline and concentration, as well as a lasting enjoyment of music, and the sensitivity and skill for making music.

*The above description of the Suzuki approach was written by teachers Libby Dixon and Molly Johnson of Oberlin, Ohio.*