

# **Suzuki Guitar Course in Denmark**

*by Anne Dorte Laub Hansen*

Suzuki? Isn't it about violins? That's the response when I tell people about my training as a Suzuki Guitar teacher.

Four tiny guitars – matching four little guitarists, maybe six to seven years old - played for us, about 50-60 guitar teachers from music schools from the entire country. Without music stands and sheets of music their teacher, Harald Söderberg from Sweden, had perfect contact with his students the whole time - in fact the students hardly ever looked at their hands but were instead watching the audience while performing.

It was overwhelming. They played beautifully - their tone was outstanding, they played musically, and their technique was incredibly good, considering their age.

The presentation made ten teachers embark on the Suzuki Guitar Course directed by Harald Söderberg. We were an odd mix of Guitar people: Some newly educated from the Royal Academy of Music, one professor from the same Academy, professional performers, music school teachers with a lot of teaching experience and I myself, who primarily teaches pre-school children. But all had in common that this was our first encounter with the Suzuki Method and very young students - usually guitar tuition is offered from age eight to ten.

Our varying backgrounds made it very exciting and interesting working together. We were alternately teacher and student and also enjoyed the co-operation when accompanying one another and playing as an ensemble. It disclosed the strengths and weaknesses of our group, and this was turned into advantages to the benefit of us all. For instance one was a skilled writer of arrangements, others had very good ideas about teaching, yet others knew a lot of material suited as backup for the Suzuki repertoire.

Several of the participants had the luck to recruit some students from age three to eight. Working with those young children turned out to be most exciting – and fun! It was great fun to see how we struggled to find alternative ways of communicating with the students. It was like evolving a hitherto unknown language. Sometimes we had to imagine a fun instrument, say a pogo stick, to make the student see that it was great fun to play the second string in the way you wanted. Through Harald Söderberg's instruction we learned to express ourselves in metaphorical phrases when, for instance describing the difference between two strokes, the angle of the wrist or other technical issues. The metaphors give the students an immediate idea of what you want them to do.

Very soon it was quite clear to me that the Suzuki Method offered fantastic new possibilities compared to the Guitar methods and schools that I had been acquainted with during my education at the Royal Academy. Wasting no time I at once started teaching my youngest students in the Suzuki way. At my public music school the students are older than recommended when starting the Suzuki Guitar Programme and the lessons are planned without parents attending. As a result of this I invited the parents to meetings and offered them tuition in basic guitar techniques to make them able to help their children practising at home. We also had a concert where the children and the parents played together and for one another. The initiatives instantly paid off and I experienced a spectacular increase in the students practising frequency and thereby in their development - technically and musically.

Most of the students I presented to the Suzuki Method had been playing and practising in the traditional way. reading music, for one year. How did the change in method affect them? All students accepted the new method, some more than others, and it proved to be very important that they accepted the idea of listening to the repertoire and always practising both old and new pieces when building their repertoire. Some students were very adept at memorizing; others still needed to read the music or to have some other form of backup. But common to all of the students was that when freed from reading the music they all had much more energy to concentrate on technical matters and on making music!

Another great advantage has been that the students share a common repertoire which makes it so easy to start playing ensemble at the group lessons and everyone also has the opportunity to be a soloist during the group lessons, because the repertoire offers fine arrangements for ensemble playing. Playing unison gives the students a sense of security and they experience that BIG sound which is so rare to guitarists.

The group lessons, the common repertoire, performing in ensemble and solo – all this gives the students a sense of mutual connection – that they are heading in the same direction; and they feel much safer performing in the group because they have complete acceptance and backing from the group.

A lot was learned and there is more – indeed we are looking forward to level 2 of the Suzuki Guitar Course.