

WHEN SHINICHI SUZUKI AMAZED TURIN

by Antonio and Lee Mosca pioneers of the Suzuki Method in Italy

...Shinichi Suzuki visited Turin in 1986 and presented a concert by a group of children who amazed the city with their talent. He spent three days at our school: he listened to all of the students, and as was his custom, at the end of the lesson he gave each of them a chocolate candy (as well as the city of Vivaldi's manuscripts, Baroque architecture and the world's second largest Egyptian Museum, Turin is also known for its chocolates) and he had encouraging words for every one of them.

...We then received a letter from him, from Japan, in which he praised the school and the high level he had found. This was a tremendous stimulus for our activity: We continued to work with passion and further improve ourselves attending various courses conducted by the Maestro held throughout Europe and in Japan. In Italy, at that time, the Suzuki method was almost unknown. It's not surprising that, despite the enormous success achieved by Shinichi and his students, Turin's Conservatory of Music did not manifest any interest in experimenting the method by initiating a Suzuki course within its programming.

...Today, even though it is much better known and utilized, the method has not yet been accepted by the 'academicians' and will still have to wait (perhaps the Convention in Turin will help us in this) before finally being included in the scholastic programs of the public schools. For now, as in the major part of the Latin countries, the Suzuki method is a didactic movement that is finding consensus within the families and among its practitioners; however it's still looked upon with suspicion and mistrust by the 'traditional' teachers, who are convinced that one cannot study music without starting from solfege (hence, at an age far more advanced than the 3 – 5 years foreseen by the Suzuki method). To teach with this method implies not only having the possibility of starting with the students at a tender age (3 – 5 years), but also means creating an atmosphere around the child, including the constant presence of a parent, that involves putting different abilities together, day after day, as in the learning of one's mother tongue: memorization, movement coordination, rhythm, singing, manual ability, listening and behavior. The learning of music, in the first phase, is mnemonic, while awaiting for the problems of

coordination and positioning to be consolidated; once these objectives have been achieved, the child automatically passes on to the reading of written notes.

There are various instruments for teaching the Suzuki method. The violin was the instrument that the method was created upon. After that, came the viola and the 'cello. Stringed instruments can be made smaller for a child's use. Then there are all the other instruments: guitar, harp, flute, piano, organ, and our latest experience in Italy, even the mandolin (whereas in Japan, the koto is used).

In the Italian Suzuki Schools, great importance is given to the program of instrumental rhythm, created and organized by Professor Elena Enrico. It begins a year before the study of the instrument itself and continues throughout the entire course of studies, bringing the student to the development of rhythm, the knowledge of solfege and harmony and the use of the keyboard.

Whoever, like us, has lived for forty years in the 'Suzuki world', knows what benefits the student can gain utilizing this method of musical education. The Suzuki method has had the power to rearrange our lives and, as have many esteemed soloists in the most famous European orchestras, we have become untiring promoters of the methodology, with the awareness that teaching children means offering them the possibility of understanding and loving music, that will remain with them for their entire lifetime.

"A beautiful sound, a good heart", Suzuki loved to repeat in his aphorisms and it's that which we teachers must cultivate in the children's souls. The study of an instrument allows one to participate in the great family of the Orchestra that, along with the triangle "teacher – child – parent" creates a barrier against the moral and spiritual degradation of our times.

SUZUKI SCHOOLS IN ITALY TODAY

There are approximately 25 Suzuki schools in Italy, concentrated mostly in the northern and central regions. The country's geographical situation does not easily allow for transferences and the scholastic structures of the south are certainly not very open to or willing to accept innovative methodologies. Turin and Milan, and all of northern Italy in

general, thanks to the influence of the French and the German cultures and their sense of business and cultural openness, have reached levels of what could be defined as a European breadth. The south, with its beauty and the innate musicality of its inhabitants, would be an ideal place for the Suzuki method to take root and grow.

Italy has a scholastic program that foresees that children remain at school until 4:30 p.m. The Italian school system thus tends to elect itself for the role as primary educator, there where, instead, the family should be involved in the forefront, spurring the child into sportive or artistic activities. For various reasons, today we are witnessing a general restlessness of our youth, a disinterest towards forms of art and culture, swallowed up by the de-personalized bombardment from television. Italy, without a renewed interest in the musical education of children, cannot hope to remain "the country of music" for long.

THE TURIN CONVENTION OF 2006

The 14th Suzuki Method World Convention (Turin, April 12-17, 2006) will be held 8 years after the death of Maestro Shinichi Suzuki, which was one year before the last world-wide Convention of Matsumoto. This next Convention will be an important meeting for the whole Suzuki educational movement: its precise task is to carry on with the Maestro's heredity and message, pursuing an objective dear to him, and that is, that "all the children in the world, thanks to music, can be happy and have a better life".

Entering into the details of the artistic organization of the 14th Suzuki Method World Convention, a general premise is necessary: at the basis of our work, is the idea of making the Convention into an educational and artistic event in order to show the Suzuki method to all the world. We have participated in many world-wide Conventions, and today, it seems more necessary than ever to us to verify the level achieved by many schools, to know what ferment of innovations there are and also to know if there's a need for an adjustment to new tastes and whether a major adherence to the original musical texts corresponds to the didactic and technical needs of the child. We must realize that spoken language has undergone substantial mutations, and likewise, so has musical language. The Suzuki method, prevalently based on Baroque music, should be able to comply with the necessity of taste and modern day research, without, however, betraying its roots. Speaking of listening and repetition, the child should be able to listen to recordings that

are better than those presently found on the market released by various recording companies. It's clear that, in Maestro Suzuki's time, not all the Suzuki professors were able to perfectly execute the music in the books. Today, the teachers' preparation has considerably improved. A lot of excellent musicians teach the children and, in our opinion, it is advisable that in fact the teacher record the tapes for listening to the music, because only in this way can the rapport of virtuoso be established between the student and maestro.

The Turin Convention aims to be a showcase for what is produced in didactic and musical terms in the various schools, and it wishes to further investigate the role of the family nucleus (in the Families Concerts), inviting parents and children to play together, and it wants to give space to the many orchestras of the many Suzuki schools throughout the world.

Two Gala Concerts will allow for 14 soloists to appear with the two most important symphonic orchestras of Turin. In four Junior and Senior Concerts, we will be able to listen to at least 60 children, selected from all over the world. The Grand Final Concert in the Olympic stadium (in February 2006, Turin will host the Winter Olympic Games), will be an homage to Maestro Suzuki and Pablo Casals, united by the ideal project of ensuring that music will become an instrument of peace and a bond between populations.

Then there's the desire of the ISI (Italian Suzuki Institute) and our staff, to render possible that this world meeting can address the problem of integration between the various populations: to live in this world means finding oneself face to face with many diverse cultures and traditions. As we believe that music can unite us in a marvelous journey, thus we cannot forget those who cannot be involved in this journey; and we must do something in particular for those disadvantaged children who don't go to school, who suffer hunger and brutality, and are the victims of the world's evils. There are those who are effectively committed in this sense: these are the institutions of the United Nations, OIL-IPEC and in general the non-governmental humanitarian agencies. Therefore we've thought of asking them to participate in the Grand Concert "Child to Child" which foresees the participation of the most important world renown cultural and show-business personalities, all together to declare with music: "stop child labour in its worst forms".

Turin is the city of Vivaldi's manuscripts (of which more than 400 are kept in the national library). So it is logical to think of concluding the manifestation with the execution of the Concerto in D minor RV 565 for two violins and 'cello (1st movement), so very famous for its fugue. The region of Piedmont is also the home of a many various kinds of popular or traditional music, and so Lee has thought of presenting a famous Mazurka (Migliavacca) to violinists who come to Turin, which can be played with a number of soloists varying from 3 to 400.

Ever since Pablo Casals, in Puerto Rico, began to organize orchestras of 'cellos, diverse composers have written for this genre of ensemble; and for this reason the Convention program will include a concert of 200 'cellists.

The morning lessons (two, of two and a half hours each) for soloists and groups, will treat pieces and techniques of the various volumes, and will be conducted by professors of Suzuki education (teachers, trainers). The stringed instrument and flute classes will have a piano accompanist. The final concerts of the instrumental courses will be held on Saturday, at the end of the three days of the courses, and will be accompanied by string ensembles (quartets or small chamber orchestras).

As you can see the 14th Suzuki Method World Convention is an ambitious project that we ask you to help support with your participation.

For further detailed information regarding the 14th Suzuki Method World Convention you may consult the web site of the organisation: www.14suzukiworldconvention.net. In a short while, there will also be the possibility of down-loading music not included in the Suzuki repertoire and the orchestral parts assigned to each student for the various concerts. We await you in Turin, from April 12 – 17, for the Easter of 2006, all together and above all, for a fantastic 14th Suzuki Method World Convention.

Until then!

Antonio and Lee Mosca