

## **How Suzuki Changed my life**

by Béla Detreköy

I was born in Budapest, Hungary, and grew up in a loving family. Though my parents did not play, I heard a lot of music played by my grandfather, a good amateur pianist. He played for his own pleasure and I have spent many hours listening to him as he practised sonatas and pieces of Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann and Chopin. I became very happy when I turned 6 and got a ½ size violin and took lessons from a lovable old musician.

After two years he recommended that my parents find a better teacher for me. I got a very good teacher who prepared me two years later to play an audition at the Frantz Liszt Academy in Budapest. I was admitted and during my studies I decided to be a musician.

This great period of study in quite a wonderful and aspiring environment quite brutally came to an end in 1944 when the war came close to Hungary. Luckily I stood with a diploma in pedagogy in my hands. The war had ripped everything up and I had to join the Hungarian army.

When the war ended I found myself in Denmark. I had my violin with me, but I had not played for a whole year. Warm hearted people took me in their home. I started practising, and played in an amateur orchestra. My patron got a teacher for me, a professor with whom I prepared a debut concert with piano. I got very good press reviews and that made it easier to get into Danish music life. I began to play as soloist. I formed a string quartet in which Tove, later my wife, played violin.

I considered Denmark as a step to a future in the USA. I also had applied for an immigrant visa. When it came I was already established and settled in Denmark, having gotten married, had a son and received citizenship. I had a position in the Royal Danish Orchestra, the finest orchestra in Denmark. I had a very reasonable working schedule. I had time to prepare for recitals and played much chamber music. Our family became larger with another son and Tove also got a chair in the Royal Orchestra. This settled life also came to an end, not by any war or other bad things. After 14 years I wanted to give up the orchestra.

In 1966 came a opportunity to go to the Faroe Islands and take a conducting, performing and teaching job. We lived only one winter on Faroe Islands. I got a hint of a vacant teaching and

performing position in a college in the USA. I applied and won the position and with leave from my orchestra, the whole family moved to Bellingham in the state of Washington. Here a new chapter began in my life.

For the first time, we came in contact with the Suzuki Method. A Swiss lady who was married to the manager of the Sears and Roebuck store in town, had spent a winter in Matsumoto with her youngest son, a polio victim. By playing violin with Dr. Suzuki, he overcame his conditional difficulties.

After her return to Bellingham, Mrs. Lawrence Friedenrich was successful in bringing together a group of parents who were interested in establishing a Suzuki teacher in town. Dr. Suzuki sent one of his students, Ms. Aruga (later Mrs. Masada), to teach the American children. The teaching took place at the collage on Saturdays and some evenings. (The chairman of the music department was Murray North, who is married to Michi Hirata North, well-known Suzuki piano teacher). I myself was busy with my class, with my orchestra and the faculty string quartet, of which Tove was also a member.

The next year Bellingham got a visit from the Japanese Tour Children. Dr. Suzuki was not with them. Instead Mrs. Suzuki followed the group. It was on this occasion that I saw for the first time how the Japanese children are playing solos and in small groups. I noticed at first sight their fine posture, their beautiful relaxed playing, their beautiful sound. I was delighted with the sensitivity of their Mozart playing. It was a high quality of violin playing. Such an impressing experience made me curious that such a beautiful result can be achieved.

After 4 1/2 years we decided that we would follow our sons who were studying in the Old country (Denmark). I got a new job as concert master in the Danish Radio Orchestra. Tove started Suzuki teaching with 5 students. I followed her on her second visit to Matsumoto in 1975. There I followed every day Dr. Suzuki's teaching. It gave an overwhelming impression and great inspiration. I had to start with my own playing. I had never heard anybody give so much and such precise advice on violin playing, especially for the bow hand. He himself had the most delightful bow hand. It became a pleasure to play, not just a duty. The repeated meetings with Dr. Suzuki at different workshops, especially those for teachers, deepened the musical, instrumental and human understanding of him. He was a representative of the spirit of the Golden Age of music in Central

Europe. He was carrying on the proud tradition of Joseph Joachim given over to him by Karl Klingler, the ideas of the great composers and musicians. To pass over this treasure to the next generation, I consider is the most beautiful task for a musician, a teacher. Dr. Suzuki made a fantastic step towards a better world. Through the music we have an opportunity to teach the soul of the growing generation.