

TEACHER TRAINING IN MATSUMOTO

By Felicity Lipman

Dr Suzuki's joyful and boisterous personality dominates the atmosphere of his institute. Little children of the kindergarten wait for him to arrive in the morning, longing for the chance to be chosen to race him up the stairs. Suzuki always wins and laughs with sheer joy of life to see the little legs of his 'opponent' working like pistons to reach the top of the stairs as he strides up three steps at a time. *"Children's legs so fast! and mine so easy!"* He maintains he is still younger than they! Suzuki's influence is felt in every activity there. He is a man with a philosophy of life – the philosophy of love. He is a living example of this. His life's work has affected the whole tone of Matsumoto City.

As a young man, Suzuki tried to persuade the dignitaries of Matsumoto to house a permanent exhibition of the work of a famous Ukiyoe artist, native of the city. They were not interested in enriching the city through art. Thirty years later, when the first generations of Suzuki's pupils had matured into adults of fine sensibilities with authority in the city, Suzuki's idea became reality.

Suzuki has never forgotten the instinct of the very young child. Most of us lose this innocence in life, but he uses both instinct and experience to divine the needs of every pupil, whether adult or child. He regards them with the same kind of affectionate amusement such as we might regard a toddler. In other words, his attitude to the adult is the same as he demonstrates to the pupils of the kindergarten. The enjoyment is mutual.

Suzuki is primarily concerned with the personality of the trainee. He has respect and love for each as a person and those qualities enable him to penetrate the barriers of the adult. He is aware of the essence of the person and can divine with a remarkable sureness the route it is necessary to take. Every personality differs so that each route to the common goal is different. The casual observer, witnessing two lessons on the same piece, might well receive totally conflicting impressions of Suzuki's ideas on that particular piece of music. They misunderstand the focus of his teaching; his work is to develop the life-force of each individual through the noble art of music.

The question of barriers in the mind of the adult pupils needs enlarging. It is noticeable that some factors are outstanding. These stir the longings of the master-teacher to put the fears of the trainee at rest and open his mind to possibilities of improvement of which he had not dreamt. The trainee feels that he deserves acknowledgement of his past learning and has a desire to protect it. Secondly, he feels in his heart that he is past the age when he can change and improve. Lastly, he expects to achieve immediately the new

technicalities rather than the need to develop them gradually. Adults feel they should be able to achieve the whole art of violin-playing immediately. After all, they have learnt the violin, they have taught the violin, and so they must know how to play it! How different from the sublime purpose of the child. No wonder Suzuki says *“violin is easy – easy for child, but difficult for teacher”* And makes his trainees repeat it after him!

Suzuki's 'teacher's eye' is so well-developed that he concentrates unfailingly on the one point which will affect well all the other grey areas in his trainee's playing. He does not merely pick one point to work on that is wrong, but assesses which point will give the maximum benefit to the tone-production, thus giving the maximum expression in the playing. *“Tone is the living soul”*. Individual lessons in Matsumoto take the form of a masterclass. This provides a useful opportunity for comparatives, helping to sharpen the trainees' perception. The masterclass is also an important factor in the development of an affinity amongst the trainees. When receiving an individual lesson from Suzuki one feels the unremitting quest for more expressive tone. He imbues one with trust, warmth and a desire to achieve. It is possible through him to attain a completely new level of ability. Through this comes self-respect, a certainty of direction and the desire to improve further. The boundaries, self-imposed in the past, are removed and the explorer's spirit is reborn.

The scene is set for unselfconscious progress towards the common goal of a beautiful tone which can give expression to the message of the composer. There is a unity in all Suzuki's teaching and that is balance – balance of the body to achieve comfort and, therefore, ease of execution; balance of the bow with the weight of the whole arm in the string. These combine to produce a clear, warm, round tone. It is impossible to achieve perfection in such an art form in one's lifetime. In the masterclass it is easy for the trainees to perceive that the difference between beginner and advanced is merely one of degree. Thus self-interest is replaced by a caring for each other's progress. It is this sameness of everybody's object that develops an affinity among the trainees. It is further enhanced by the weekly group lesson and the weekly solo concert.

No-one disrupts the harmony of these lessons by asking questions. These can only divert the attention away from Suzuki's teaching point. What is not immediately understood is stored in the mind temporarily so as to avoid missing a single word of what he has to say while they have the opportunity of hearing it. Time is short. Once away from the lessons there will be all the time necessary to find their own answers upon reflection on the content of the lesson and upon recollection of any information not immediately understood. In the weekly group lesson, Suzuki may choose, for example, one fine technical point for study. It may be only two bars of Rameau's **Gavotte**. He will demonstrate the sound required by the music in this short passage, explaining how it is achieved technically. It seems easy. Then each of the forty trainees will try it once in turn. Nobody can reproduce Suzuki's demonstration; each version is slightly different in a variety of ways! These fine differences in tone are audible to the trainees and thus a totally new level of aural perception is developed. Although perhaps none of them has achieved total success in the

lesson, Suzuki has shown then the route for practice. *“Practise 10,000 times and then you can **do it!**”* For the layman, that means 100 times each day for three months before the technical point becomes assimilated and an instinctive muscular impulse is provoked when the ear demands that particular sound! Often this type of group lesson will take the form of a ‘competition’ where the prize may be a chocolate and handshake and good humour all round. Suzuki constantly reminds the trainees *“‘I know’ is not ability; ability is ‘I can’.”*

Once a week, also, the trainees are all required to play a solo in the main hall in order that Suzuki may assess the development of their tone. This particular hurdle inspires the trainees to raise each other’s morale. In this opportunity for comparatives, amid the supportive attitude of each other, it would be difficult for the trainees not to progress. They thrive upon the goodwill of each other.