

EXPANDING HORIZONS BY MARK BJORK

A Review by Martin Rüttimann

When I saw Mark Bjork's book *Expanding Horizons* in the store at the American Suzuki Institute in Stevens Point, my very first thought was, "Another Suzuki book—do we really need it?" Repetition is a crucial tenet of the Suzuki approach, but this does not necessarily mean that the books pouring out on the market need to be repetitive too. In the following review I will show how my apprehension changed upon reading Bjork's new book.

The title, *Expanding Horizons*, could actually be the title of *any* new book, reflecting the intention of any author and any reader. Yet the title completely fulfills what is promised. The subtitle, "The Suzuki-Trained Violinist Grows Up," makes one even more curious to read this book. While we have already quite a few publications in various forms which are about the basic principles of the Suzuki approach, we do not have a lot of publications about what comes *after* the Suzuki books, concerning how to "expand horizons." It is not just another list of supplementary materials for Book 6 upwards. (While such lists are very helpful, they are already circulating in hundreds of teacher training units and teachers' meetings.) It is also a resource for very practical suggestions (e.g., how to motivate teenagers to continue their instrumental studies, whether with the goal to become a fine amateur musician, or whether with the goal to eventually become a professional musician).

Besides the more technical aspects of teaching at that level—such as how to incorporate sight-reading, scales or orchestral studies into the teaching of youngsters, as well as the time management and broadening problems peculiar to this age group—the most beneficial aspects of this book are the tiny tips and tricks interspersed throughout, based on Bjork's tremendous experience after a nearly life-long career as a Suzuki teacher. All this will be most supportive for any Suzuki teacher, both freshmen and experienced teachers. It gives one a long-term perspective, how to build up a prospering Suzuki studio or even a school, in which the teenage student group is somehow the chief ingredient of a nourishing and substantial "Suzuki soup." The value of building the studio at all levels is described from various perspectives—technically, organisationally as well as from the human side, since a Suzuki teacher likes to be more than just an instructor. It may be a special art for a teacher to continue with the three- or four-year-old student throughout adolescence, but Bjork maintains that it is most valuable for any kind of studio or school to keep advanced students, not just to give new students a long-term perspective, but to offer motivation through studio recitals and concerts.

I highly recommend Mark Bjork's book *Expanding Horizons* to interested Suzuki teachers at all levels. It is a 150-page book, full of information, and especially easy to read, with twenty-two chapters in which one can look up information effortlessly. In particular, the well-elaborated repertoire list with short but very helpful descriptions about each piece, and the chapters about fingerings for scales, are not new but are well thought out. So, what about the Mozart concerti? Where are you going with your students after Book 8? Read the book and expand your horizon!

Martin Rüttimann is President of the Swiss Suzuki Association and an ESA Violin Teacher Trainer. This review will also appear this spring in the Spring 2009 SAA Journal.