

# European Xchange Weekend in Germany for Suzuki teachers of Violin and Viola

By Roberto Sarno, Suzuki Violin Teacher, Denmark

Some show up to get inspiration, some to meet people, some others just to add one more voice to their CV. The fact is, that many interesting people meeting at the **European Xchange Weekend at Remscheid Academy**, was one special thing that happened to me in 2008. And I would like to tell you about it.

I had just passed the exam to take my level five, and there I was, two weeks later, presented with this great opportunity. Exchanging ideas, in an inspirational two-days meeting among teachers: what a precious gift to humanity this is.

If I was to mention the very reason why we all exist, I would probably say that we exist because of those who made us. I am not referring to our parents, or grandparents, but to those great and brave people who have thought of humanity above themselves. With extreme altruism, and the firm intent to accumulate useful knowledge and to pass it on. When I met **Kerstin Wartberg**, she gave me the impression of being one of those. Is it because of the years that she spent in Japan, studying at the Talent Education Institute in Matsumoto? Or simply because she has accumulated teaching experience over the years, that have let her write several books on the subject? And how about her organizational skills, that let her make things happen? Things like the 8th Suzuki Method International Conference in Berlin. One might say that it takes greatness and braveness to do what she has done. I would say simply love.

It did have all the requirements to live up to our expectations. Strong names in the program, concrete arguments treated in the two-days meeting, and a logistic that was nearing flawlessness. Yes, we all know how difficult it is to administrate time, and how easy it is to run out of it. But even if some had more time than others to make their point (I got less than 10 min.), you could smell the excitement and the curiosity all around. And that is what really made the difference.

To listen to **Kathrin Averdung** means to listen to someone who has met and studied with people like **Ruggiero Ricci**, who, from personal experience I can say is someone who knows exactly what will work when you are on a stage in front of a thousand people following every movement of your bow.

Then what can we say about viola (apart from all those funny jokes!)? What do most people really know about this intriguing instrument, that is held like a violin but has those nice deep tones, produced by those corpulent strings, on a mass of wood which can sometimes be heavy to support on your shoulder? Not much I tell you. Only that it has been a difficult instrument to get a hold of ever since I remember. And why is that? Why people keep ignoring it, at a tender age? Maybe lack of information? Afraid to try?

The care that has been taken of this fascinating instrument was the one that it deserved. Not only a step by step briefing by **Susanna Obando**, illustrating the different approaches to the instrument in an early age. But at a certain point I looked around me and I found myself surrounded by violinists who had a strange, confident look in their faces. My God: they were realizing that the viola is actually an instrument that can be taught to children! Please, do not get me started!

The **mixed program** gave the chance that teachers from **14 countries** were waiting for. It was a large fishnet for the Suzuki community, rich of all varieties, shape and taste. And the reason why it was never boring is that: there always is a bigger fish!

**Jan Matthiesen, Mike Hoover, Ines Armanino and Antonella di Giulio**, were only some of the many interesting names appearing on the program. They all showed that, from new finger exercises to music mind games and simple but funny tools to train basic movements, one is really never done learning.

The night atmosphere was warmed by a cosy bar that served as a get-together, where it felt like the old days at "band camp", when people loosened themselves in social behaviour rich of jokes and anecdotes about this or that famous musician, with the subtle complicity of the occasional drink.

The presentation of **Böhm's Perpetual Motion**, by violinist **Rudolf Gaehler** was very convincing. The fact that most of us did not do their homework, at least reading it before the meeting, only contributed to convince us that it is not that difficult, but it has a lot to teach technically and, in accordance to the best Suzuki tradition, while learning a nice melody.

It really peaked when **Prof. Hartmut Lindemann** caught everyone's attention, illustrating the kind of recordings available in the 40's and 50's, the very ones that inspired Mr. Suzuki for his priceless work. It is funny to listen carefully to all the various expressions and styles. To only think, that a beautiful portamento was nearly taboo until only a few years ago, and now all the major interpreters are using it largely to try to recreate some forgotten atmosphere in a concert hall, is disarmingly interesting. The soave vibrato and the subtle phrasings are all nice details only begging to be noticed. The strong characters and the musical geniuses of an era that will never come back, but that can very well serve as an inspiration for future work.

The strong side of how the Suzuki philosophy is administrated, consists in the exchange of information. If we take a quick glance at the musical world, we can see on one side, still the remaining survivals of an outlived society made of teachers who think that they have the one and only secret to teach their instrument, and they are so terribly afraid to just give away what they consider their trade secret, that they make their information available only to a restrict number of students, who grow up in the belief that they have that something that most people do not. Yes, only until they find someone who knows the very same things, or more! On the other side we have the Suzuki world. A fraternity of good willing educators who are not afraid of sharing their experience with others, because they realize that this is the only way to improve our knowledge and understanding of music. This is our humble contribution to a more civilized humanity.

*Please note:*

21/22 November 2009

**2<sup>nd</sup> European Xchange Weekend in Germany  
for Suzuki teachers of Violin, Viola, Cello and Piano  
at the Remscheid Academy**

*Additional Courses for European Suzuki Violin Teachers at the Remscheid Academy:*

Intensive Book 4 Course: 20/21 November 2009

Intensive Book 1 Course: 22/23 November 2009