

Master Classes in Scandinavia

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Being an ESA Suzuki Teacher Trainer does not only include initiating trainee teachers in the Suzuki method, but also participating in master classes with pupils from several European Suzuki schools. Those master classes where we teach are an inexhaustible source of learning, about music as well as about human relations. Last summer, I was invited again by two countries that I especially like: Sweden (Jönköping) and Finland (Ellivuori), for two training courses, each lasting a week.

I had already been invited to Northern countries several times and I am still very much attracted to these countries, always feeling really moved by the sensitivity, the warmth of the welcome and the care and attention people show to the feelings of others. Yet, their living conditions are not easy, the days are very short in winter, the sun shines only for a few hours a day, and the weather is always cold and rainy whereas in summer the nights are almost non-existent. Paradoxically, the Swedes and the Finish (as well as the Danes) are always smiling and welcoming. In these countries, large families are common, and entire families can be seen during the training courses. The parents cope with the different timetables of their children, since each of them practises a different instrument, and they are always in a good mood. The parents are relaxed and participate with enthusiasm to all the lessons, listening, singing, sometimes dancing in the classroom! The courses are mainly based on collective work (collective lessons, chamber music, orchestra) though sometimes pupils ask to have a private lesson to prepare their competitive examinations or their future auditions in better conditions.

Everyday concerts are organised by pupils to entertain during the meals.

In Finland there are “Baby Suzuki” classes (no, you’re not dreaming) to introduce rhythm to 5 or 6 month old babies. Children also sing from an early age. Suzuki singing courses are much developed there.

The teachers need a lot of energy for these master classes, for, apart from the lessons (in English of course), we take part in the different rehearsals and concerts that have been planned: chamber music, orchestration, and, of course, the concerts given by our own pupils as soloists or in ensembles. And naturally, to end the day, we have a good old meeting every evening. The teachers from many European countries are all Teacher Trainers. I often see Christophe Bossuat, and our Belgian friends Wilfried Van Gorp or Koen Rens during these workshops. These courses are also wonderful places to share and discuss new teaching methods and ideas to improve our choice of music pieces or bow strokes.

The Suzuki teaching method has become well established in these countries; it is naturally part of the musical landscape. Yet, traditional or folk music has also an important place. It is part of everyday life. So each child discovers this repertoire from a very early age and during these workshops wonderful folk music concerts are given conducted by talented teachers who specialise in that kind of music and play on typical local instruments. The work done, in four days, often orally, all instruments included, is impressive and a real pleasure to sing, to play, a genuine enthusiasm, a feeling of happiness seem to come from every musician and from the audience during these concerts. Scandinavian folk music sounds very much like Celtic or Irish music, their songs are very attractive too.

The places where these courses take place are chosen with care, in Sweden, in the park where I was teaching, I was regularly visited by a doe from a nearby reserve and the Finnish course was held in a big hotel deep in the country, near a wonderful lake and next to a sauna in a little chalet. And oh... the sauna! It is an institution there and a means to relax after the lessons. A nice hot sauna and ... splash, right in the cool lake! On several occasions, I was invited to share the intimacy of a family celebration and I was always given a warm and typical welcome.

I really enjoy the chance to be invited to teach in these countries, I consider this as a great moment to share and exchange. And aren't sharing and exchanging at the very heart of the mission to question and open people's minds of a Suzuki teacher and trainer?