

Warsaw Workshop

By Andreas Schönle

The Polish Suzuki Association organized a piano workshop in Warsaw on July 28-30. About 50 children—mostly from Poland, but also from the UK, Spain, Sweden, Iceland and Norway – participated in an intense three days filled with music-playing and related activities. The workshop was housed in the Józef Elsner Music School, a complex of three buildings surrounding an internal courtyard within stone throw of Warsaw’s Old Town. Participants received accommodation in the School’s comfortable dormitory, where they were treated to delicious lunches.

Pupils had the opportunity to play on top-quality pianos and to perform in the School’s beautiful concert hall. With many windows open due to the heat wave, the courtyard resonated with music all day long, which produced an atmosphere of bustling creativity. Instruction was given mostly in Polish, but with a sprinkling of English. A few master classes were taught in English for the benefit of foreign students. Yet again the workshop demonstrated that music knows no language barriers as international students felt no discomfort from the exposure to admittedly very intricate and fast-paced Polish and quickly mingled with other children.

The organizers along with all the teaching staff, created a warm, supportive, and joyful atmosphere. In addition to their group piano class, pupils had daily instruction in Orff, choir, dance, and sight-reading. All three student concerts took place in plenary form, which facilitated getting to know one another. Parents were drafted into participating in some activities, again breaking boundaries and setting an example of playful public performance. The final choral concert resonated with the voices of three groups—children, women and men—intoning a wonderful canon, along with the mellifluous “Edelweiss” from *The Sounds of Music*. No Suzuki workshop could do without a Fun Night, and this one was no exception, as children (and staff!) exhibited *con brio* their various talents and sense of humour.

This parent found the instruction to be consistently of a very high standard, testifying both to the endurance of top-notch artistic education in Poland and to the recent blossoming of the Suzuki movement there. Indeed, a teacher-training workshop directed by Marzena Jasińska and Katarzyna Borowiak took place in tandem.

Chopin did not fail to hover above the workshop and lend his benevolent encouragement to all musicians. On the final day, many participants took a trip to Żelazowa Wola, the beautiful country estate where he was born and where he heard the Masovian folk music that inspired some of his pieces. There, amidst the towering old trees of the park, we had the opportunity to listen to a concert by Katarzyna Popowa-Zydroń, the teacher of Rafał Blechacz, the winner of the XV Chopin Piano Competition in 2005.

This workshop will remain etched in the memory of its participants, providing motivation and support during solitary practice. All parents and children would surely join me in thanking the organizers and staff for their hard work and inspiring teaching.