

Reports from the 12th Suzuki Method World Convention in Dublin – August 1995

The Fiddler Came To School

by Susan Grilli

This past summer, at the 12th Suzuki Method World Convention in Dublin, Ireland, Suzuki Early Education took a front seat, for the first time ever at an international conference. Parents, children and teachers shared in twenty four different presentations and classes given by Dorothy Jones and Susan Grilli, both for the Teachers' Course and the Children's Course – a total of ten days in all. Dorothy brought her lead teachers from the Children's Talent Education Centre in London, Ontario, Canada to share their work in the Parents as Partners Project for mothers and babies, mothers and toddlers, Pre-schoolers and Kindergarteners. Joan Mitsui, Judy Wright and Sharon Jones worked hard to develop demonstration classes to be given for four days and almost 60 parents and children. On the last day, children and parents brought hugs and regrets that it was all over so soon, and it was clear that strong parent-teacher partnerships were developed in even that short time.

A highlight, for me, of the children's classes was an impromptu visit of one of the convention's resident Irish traditional fiddlers to play for the children. Canadian fiddler Sharon Jones and John Sheehan, of Ireland's famed 'Dubliners' had never met until that afternoon, but took off together, improvising and playing up a storm for the children. It was the miracle of a superbly taught Suzuki student who has learnt first by ear, and an equally superbly talented self-taught fiddler, whose whole tradition is handed down by ear and direct example, 'Suzuki-style' – the perfect creative combination! The children caught the spirit of it so well, that two Irish children, who had learned Irish dancing, mesmerised the audience when they just spontaneously rose to their full proud heights, waited for the beat, extended their arms straight downward to their sides and began to move with the music. These children were not dressed in the traditional costumes for Irish dancing that were to stun us a few nights later during the Folk Evening for music and dancing from all the countries represented at the convention, but it didn't matter. In Reeboks, the children pointed their toes and showed by their proud concentration their very real passion for what they were doing. Before we knew it, other children



Susan Grilli reading to children in Suzuki ECE class

were coming up from the audience to join in and learn how to do this fascinating looking thing – it was the moment all teachers dream of, when the class seems to teach itself!

I thought with regret that the rest of the conference could not be a part of the fiddling session, for it exemplified everything the Early Childhood classes were trying to get across about parents and teachers (and other talented adults!) working together for the sake of young children. When I returned home, I heard from Dorothy Conaghan that she is working with Irish Primary School teachers, giving them a course which, though billed as "Music in the Classroom", has a way of becoming "Suzuki in the Classroom" instead. This is a next step the Suzuki Association of the Americas has in mind for Suzuki Early Education, and I think it represents a way to get those good Suzuki teaching techniques into the hands of general educators. They are, after all, looking desperately for answers to current educational problems. Suzuki's eternal triangle of parent, teacher and child could be an important part of educational solutions, in *any* early childhood setting.

Now that the spark has been lit in Ireland for Suzuki Early Education, perhaps the next best step would be to give full five-day courses for teachers and parents, on the development of a Suzuki-based ECE programme. Another important step to take is to get anyone who can make the trip, to observe over at least a week in Dorothy's Children's Talent Education Centre in London, Ontario. An intensive introductory course would allow teachers and teacher-trainees to get to know each other well and engage in real in-depth dialogue about dreams for innovative new projects, and practical realities as well. Included should be a chance for teachers to travel to sites where new programmes are planned, if possible, or to visit on-going ones, to see where people are, and where they would like to go with those dreams.

In our sessions, Dorothy and I were likely to have teachers and parents from Ireland, the U.S., Brazil, Australia, Japan, England, Iceland, Italy, Holland, Canada . . . and we had people stick with us for the whole ten days, sometimes giving up instrument sessions that they were also very interested in attending. We seemed to add people to our ranks as we went along, who had not necessarily planned to be in Early Childhood sessions when they first came to the convention. It was exciting to see this momentum for Suzuki Early Education, and it bodes well for the future of our work.

In the Teachers' course, lectures and demonstrations with slides and videos were given on the Suzuki Kindergarten, Pre-school and Baby Classes at C.T.E.C. in London, Ontario; on Nurturing Parents as Teachers, on the innovative work in the Reggio Emilia pre-schools and infant-toddler centres in Italy, which is philosophically so in tune with Suzuki with its extensive use of the parent-teacher partnership; and on early childhood music educators, Dalcroze, Orff, Kodaly and Suzuki and the ways they complement one another. Other talks centred on



Children really into the Irish dancing!

the ways that environment affects learning, why Suzuki ideas are so useful in the general education classroom, and how the Suzuki Association of the Americas has made a special new commitment to Suzuki Early Education through its new mission: "Creating Learning Community". We gave one public lecture, "Suzuki Early Education: A Gift For Life", and another presentation for all convention participants on the What, Why and How of Suzuki E.C.E. We never ever rested and saw very little of Dublin, but we were very, very happy to have this wonderful opportunity! We owe many thanks to Dorothy Conaghan and Magsie Goor for all their hard work to see that the Early Childhood track was such a success. In fact, we owe a special thanks to Ireland and its people, for their graciousness and warm hospitality – everyone working for the convention, as well as all those we came in contact with at Jury's Hotel, were a living reminder that Ireland *means* it when it extends to you "Cead Milo Failte", a hundred thousand welcomes!

I should like to end by sharing some of what happened in the classes for children in the second week of the convention. The classes were an hour long and the almost sixty children were, by and large, 4 to 6 years old. Dorothy Jones and Joan Mitsui were in one room and Judy Wright and I in another, with Sharon Jones going between classes to do music. Each of us had fifteen children one hour and fifteen another and, although the results were very, very good, we would have liked to have extended the classes longer, so that projects that spontaneously spun off those we had planned could have had a chance to flower. The structure of the hour-long children's class was as follows: there was taped music playing as children entered, then children were asked for a word they would like us to write for them on a special card – at first their names, then someone they like especially or something they loved doing, or something in the environment, which was our theme for the week – that was important to them. One teacher would explain the parent role to the parents while the other worked with the arriving children. We wanted to let the parents know how to observe and how to be wonderful assistants to *all* the children. A song, a speech pattern and movement to music followed, then the favourite science experiment. Because of our environmental theme, we were concentrating on recycling and pollution of water, air etc. For this reason, one experiment that showed very graphically, but simply, how oil spills hurt the environment, was the most popular one of all, with both the children *and* the parents. This was about liquid levels, and showed how objects with different densities float at different levels. Syrup was poured into a container, then the same amount of oil. Then the same amount of cold water was added. The children watched what happened when a cork, a plastic block, and a grape were put into the container. (One parent was so excited about seeing the experiment that he asked two of the children to move over so that he could see!) Art meant torn tissue collage in mural form with all the children working together, or origami, and the hour ended with one teacher telling stories to the children, while the other talked quietly with the parents about what we

had wanted to accomplish, and asked them for their observations. One day, I noticed with astonishment that a Swedish father who had come early with his daughter, was sitting on the floor reading "Millions of Cats" to her – in Swedish! He was translating on the spot! Another father left me with the very bitter-sweet thought that his son had been very difficult for all his teachers, but he would listen to me . . . Yet another parent shared his more advanced origami skills with us, and we all learned something new for the next time. Also for next time; an Irish story-teller!

We were interested in showing parents and visiting teachers how children could concentrate on specific projects within one theme in just four one-hour sessions during one week, to make our point that any Suzuki studio could include classes such as this, with parents and teachers working together as closely as they do for their children's instrumental instruction. What we shared with parents:

1. Being good observers of their own and others' children.
2. Becoming skilful assistants to their own child and other children in the group.
3. Creating an inspiring learning environment.
4. Watching how the teacher works, and learning from it (as the teacher also learns from watching the parent-child interaction).
5. Understanding that the richest education occurs when all ages are learning together productively. Combination of self-discipline and creativity in a community of learners of all ages.
6. Taking risks by becoming lobbyists for the best education of their children; strong advocates for government support of the best possible education for our youngest students, when their ability to learn is at its highest.

What we shared with teachers:

1. Suzuki has done a tremendous thing in giving us this faith that *any* child is capable.
2. Children must be given *time* to learn at their own pace.
3. It is as important to have a thorough understanding of the why, what and how behind the teaching and the philosophy it is based on, as it is to have a wonderful way with the children in the classroom.
4. Teachers are facilitators of children's learning, rather than instructors, and are equally committed to nurturing *parents*, as the most important teachers of their children.
5. Teachers need to give parents a vast educational vocabulary of things to do with children, and a multitude of creative ways to approach the same learning step.
6. Teachers need to give parents a re-affirmation of themselves as wonderful teachers – show them how they can fulfil Suzuki's dream for them to teach *everything* to their young children in as inspired a way as they taught their own language.
7. Teachers must communicate to children their certainty that children will eventually 'get it' – if not today, someday.
8. Teachers need to encourage a rich communication between home and school, and school and community.
9. It is essential to develop a trusting collaboration among teachers and parents, for the best possible early education of the child.
10. The teacher who dares you to be the best you can be gets your life-long devotion.
11. Teachers need compassion and understanding for what parents go through in raising children and they need to commit to the idea that every parent starts with a desire for what's best for the child.
12. Never forget that the Suzuki philosophy is about an approach to the *whole* education of the young child, and not about instrumental instruction alone.

The proud bearing of the young Irish dancers in our pre-school classes brought tears to our eyes and, as other children got up to join the dance, it was children teaching children. Surely that is what Suzuki is all about!



A science experiment in the Early Childhood Education class

Report from the organising committee of the 12th Suzuki Method World Convention in Dublin – August 1995

by *Magsie Goor*

For the last three years, our Chairman, Peter Malone, has led with efficiency, using his influence and demand of high standards from all. The staff in Jury's Hotel, the venue for the Teachers' Course, were continually obliging. Dorothy Conaghan, the Music Co-ordinator, had the great ability of forward planning and always stayed clear-minded through all circumstances. Catherine O'Sullivan-Gallagher directed the Piano course with quiet assurance, helped by Caroline Gowers and Anne Turner. Everything was organised and "ready to go" well before the convention started. Catherine has written a separate report about the piano course.

What a calibre of **violin** faculty chosen by Christophe Bossuat! He took on enormous responsibilities during the two weeks, guiding our courses with encouragement and professional expertise.

The **Advanced Violin** section during the Teachers' course benefited from William Starr's choice of material, and his *77 Variations* was really well received. I hope we will get more training at the next Convention. Felicity Lipman taught the Bach E Major Preludium, interspersed with Alexander Technique, a very necessary addition. Harold Brissenden taught Wienavski's Romance plus several other advanced pieces, equally attractive and useful. We had a lot of very enlightened help with teaching scales and other material from Barbara Barber, and the teachers in Ireland will benefit greatly from her lively and vital sessions.

During the Teachers' Course, the **viola** faculty joined the violin tonalisation directed by Christophe Bossuat each day at 8.45am. [Their daily timetable consisted of four hours, except on the last day when they had two hours] William Preucil gave the violas instruction from book 4 through to book 6. He also played at the Faculty concert, which was really well attended. People had to sit on the floor! Elizabeth Stuen-Walker came from the States with her viola group, with that wonderful viola earthy sound, and gave a demonstration which they recorded at the O'Reilly Hall for US publication. For the Children's course they were joined by Clare Santer, and there were 35 students altogether.

The **Cello** Teachers' course was small and select and took place in the Jury's Group office, with kind permission from Peter Malone. They started the day with their own tonalisation session and divided the section's group lessons into two, led by Haukur Hannesson (Iceland) and Tanya Carey (USA). The cello Faculty from the Children's course with 47 Cello students gave a resounding performance for the final concert at the O'Reilly Hall on August 5th.

Suzuki **Harp** never having been taught in Ireland before, we had a great time procuring pedal harps for their faculty. Mary

Kay Waddington did a valiant job and has motivated keen interest among the Irish children and parents attending the course. Marie Lorcini was like the "Pied Piper" bringing both pupils and harps from London, Ontario. I really thought I would lose the container and all off the trailer!

The **Flute** course, directed by Mr Takahashi is described in a separate account by Sarah Murray who organised the course and timetable.

It was great that both flutes and harps were able to participate in the Teachers' **Orchestra**. For two of the seven children's Orchestras we were able to include both a double bass and saxophone player, with the helpful arranging of Johannes Lievaart. Thanks also to all the faculty members who conducted both Teachers' and Children's Orchestras.

Alexander Technique was taught by Sarah Nettleton, who also accompanied throughout the Convention.

During the Teachers' Course, Philippe Francais managed successfully to hold together a **Guitar** course and train both adults and children, ranging in age from 4 years to 80 years old. There were not enough participants to enable us to run separate Teachers' and Children's Courses. Philippe included individual, demonstration and group lessons, gave the history and development of Suzuki guitar and conducted a very successful concert at the end of the Teachers' Course.

Paivi Kukkamaki, her **Singing** department and the few who were registered for the Teachers Course were able to join the ECE for one hour each day. What a delight the children from Finland were, performing in their national costume on the stage of the O'Reilly Hall. All young students on the Children's Courses also benefited from singing for one hour each day.

How proud we were to be the first Convention to include **Early Childhood Education** (ECE) as a full-time department. The article by Susan Grilli describes this and is fascinating reading: she has combined the Irish Folk Music into it so well, and it is full of fun stories.

"Suzuki - Sound, Sharing and sport", the heading for the Convention was truly fulfilled, and children, parents and teachers left with all these, and also filled with delicious meals and rested in comfort. A typical sports day would consist of either basketball, badminton, gymnastics, football, table tennis or Brendan O'Hara, with his didgeridoo demonstrating left/right co-ordination (brain gym). This was all in addition to their Suzuki programmes.

The **organisers'** jobs were certainly varied during the courses. Pat Durnin, Sabine Goor, Alison Clarke, Frank Bannister and the computer all worked through the nights finalising time-tabling. "Pat's Office" was the centre of all the hubbub and never-ending information-flow. We all seemed to actually suffer from "Fax-itis" and "Computerisation"!

The Panel of **Adjudicators** (Christophe Bossuat and Anne Turner) who flew to Dublin for a meeting prior to the Convention worked very hard with their final decisions for the Gala concert and daily recitals, which were of excellent calibre.

We were fortunate with all the help we received from Suzuki faculty around the world, always assisting when needed and giving advice. **The ISA Board** were extremely supportive and generous with their help, led by Mr Toshio Takahashi.

No convention can survive without **professional consultants**, and we had the best! Mary Diamond, Tony Brazil and the girls seemed to cope with all eventualities. Mrs Waltraud Suzuki, Princess Eleonore zu Salm-Salm and Henry Turner had their days organised in this brilliant weather. Who organised the sun-shine? was it directed by Dr Suzuki from Japan? The untypical Irish weather brought all the "green shirts" (The Convention helpers) and their stalls out into the grounds of Mount Anville, smiling and forever helpful with any problem that arose.

Last but not least, my husband John undertook the job of Master of Ceremonies and organising the Opening ceremony in the O'Reilly Hall with clarity and hard work. Peter Malone, President Mary Robinson and Mrs Suzuki welcomed the delegates from the ISA Board, the Faculty, and all the children and parents. Peter thanked our overall sponsor, Coca-Cola, for their enormous assistance, as well as several other sponsors who gave generously.



Outdoor practise at Mount Anville School

Photo: Amanda Martin

The Piano Department

by Catherine O'Sullivan-Gallagher
The Organising Committee

Children's Course

What a fantastic, auspicious opening! Can any country aspire to follow it? blazing sunshine, the cream of the Suzuki family, participants from every corner of the earth, and a wonderfully relevant opening address by the President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, who in her speech set the tone for the rest of the week.

We had exciting concerts to attend every lunch time. We were privileged to have had the opportunity to see Micah Hulscher (USA), Laura Arnold (USA) and Annalisa Stagliano (Switzerland) perform at the Gala Concerto concert. We, pianists were excited to have seen Keely Perrin (USA) perform for the first time a concerto with orchestra on Thursday night in the O'Reilly Hall, and Kimbali Harding (Australia) had us on our feet at the closing ceremony on Saturday morning. On Tuesday night in the O'Reilly Hall we had the Faculty Recital at which both piano teachers Michi North and Lola Tavor captivated the audience.

The 12th World Suzuki Convention must surely go down in the annals of Suzuki as the Convention where pianists came of age. There were 117 piano students from around the world. Because of the numbers attending we had to use two separately located College of Music buildings. Daily choir and lunch time concerts took place at the McCann Hall in Chatham Row.

The timetable was very clearly laid out and four days were scheduled the same. Every child had an individual lesson each day, along with Kodaly or group lesson, keyboard class and mini-master class lessons (for repertoire). Each child had a scheduled practice each day, with the possibility of an extra slot for 85% of the children.

Keyboard classes seemed to be a great success. We had specified pieces beforehand in each of books 1-5 that pupils should be able to play, and this seemed to have worked well.

Lunchtime concerts were open to all children on the course and children from various levels performed each day.

The option of sports was available in Mount Anville between 5.00 and 6.00 pm each day, but many were too exhausted by the well-filled day and the incredible heat to participate.

Teachers of the Children's Course included Anne Turner (UK) and Caroline Gowers (UK), joint heads of Faculty, and Doris Koppelman (USA), Huub de Leeuw (Netherlands), Christine Magasiner (UK), Esther Lund Madsen (Denmark), Peter Hagn-Meincke (Denmark), Ruth Miura (France), Nehama Patkin (Australia), Peggy Swingle (USA), Ita O'Donovan (Ireland), Lola Tavor (Switzerland), Michi North (USA), Constance Starr (USA), Frank Heneghan (Ireland) and Bernie Sherland (Ireland).

On Saturday morning the pianists took part in the first Closing Ceremony, and there was an opportunity for the choir to perform here. Kimbali Harding and David Laing, in national costume, represented us on the piano, performing "La Campanella" by Liszt and Theme by Beethoven from Book 3. Then it was time for hugs, kisses and addresses to be exchanged, a few tears to be shed, and a firm commitment made to start preparing for Honolulu!

Teachers' Course

The Piano Course was directed by Anne Turner and Caroline Gowers (joint heads of faculty). Teachers were: Nada Brissenden (Australia), Doris Koppelman (USA) Esther Lund Madsen (Denmark), Ruth Miura (France), Michi Hirata North (USA), Nehama Patkin (Australia), Constance Starr (USA), and Lola Tavor (Switzerland).

Our day began with a talk. The course opened with an inspiring talk given by Ruth Miura on Suzuki philosophy. On Friday, Doris Koppelman gave us a most useful talk on Alexander Technique as applied to pianists, and on Saturday morning Anne Turner, Nada Brissenden and Constance Starr

gave us a joint talk on Suzuki Teacher Training in three continents.

Trainees were grouped according to their book level, and the first session each morning was on repertoire at our own levels. Each group had five or less trainees in it, and this gave an intimate feel to the sessions.

Each day, demonstration pupils attended, and we were fortunate to have the opportunity to watch the many excellent teachers teach these pupils. Some pupils attended both days, and watching the follow-up was interesting.

Each trainee teacher had an individual lesson each day. On Thursday and Friday these lessons were with the same teacher, and on Saturday we had a different teacher. It is always fascinating to have another opinion on one's work.

Lola Tavor chaired a round-table discussion on Saturday, where issues relating to what had been done on the course were discussed.

Esther Lund Madsen gave us a fascinating talk on Technique, using an English Book 5 student, Laura Hoskins, to demonstrate. We trainees came away with our heads full of ideas for ways of motivating our pupils to work on their technique.

On Friday, Constance Starr spoke to us of her experiences in Japan some time ago, and also spoke about her forthcoming book on rounds and canons, which sounds great for the younger pupil.

At 8.30 am each day we became totally integrated with the rest of the Suzuki family when we all attended the various lectures available to us in Jury's Hotel. Many of us were fascinated to watch Philippe Francais's talk of the Suzuki Guitar, and Dorothy Jones' talk on Early Childhood Education.

To summarize, while the teachers' course was short, it was packed full of goodies for trainees. The timetable was very clear and easy to follow, so we had no wandering sheep! We felt privileged to have been tutored by so many fantastic teacher trainers from around the globe, and we all basked in the glow of the untypical weather!



Caroline Gowers teaching Nicola Beattie

Photo: Jennifer O'Neill