



Ode to Joy, Ode to Sorrow

Living "Living Tone"

By Victoria Vorreiter

The greatness, the uniqueness, the elegance—that which will endure—lies in the depth and breadth of Suzuki method philosophy. Shinichi Suzuki had the vision to encircle a solid methodology for musical instruction with the belief that music itself, in manifest ways, is invaluable in our lives. Training fine ability on an instrument becomes the model for developing one's highest potential in all areas of life, most importantly, in cultivating personal character. In this way he hopes to influence individuals, families and communities around the globe, all in the service of world peace.

As a methodology Ability Development has at its core a graduated, integrated course of study to develop excellence on one's instrument. Every aspect has been examined to ensure the success of each child. A prototype that

considers body work, instrumental technique, aural development, motivation, family support, communal experience and teacher education has been successfully established. By considering the growth of the whole child, physical, intellectual and emotional development can flourish together.

At a certain point, though, Dr. Suzuki transcended the study of instrumental technique in pursuit of the sensibility for "natural tone," the resonant vibration that continues to sound even after a note has been played, "like the sound of a temple bell... The tone that rings on when a string is plucked is a beautiful, pure tone. Let your child listen often to it, and start practice sessions with attempts to create the same tone color with the bow." Beautiful tone is a consequence of one's awareness to listen at a deep level and to emulate what is perceived. Dr. Suzuki often told his students, "Life in tone, heart in tone." Abundant resonance, he felt, reflects a radiant life force, one that is not limited to the realm of music. Tone directly resonates with life itself. (Fumiyo

Kuramochi, "The History and Study of Tonalization," *ASJ*, V28 #4) The search for primal tone of an instrument becomes a metaphor for cultivation of authentic tone of the self. Plumbing the treasures of music then can be a means to explore the most penetrating aim of the soul. "What is man's ultimate direction in life? It is to look for Love, Truth, Virtue, Beauty."

One of the lessons of this lifelong process perhaps is to learn to listen consciously, discriminatingly, compassionately ("with suffering"), in order to perceive meaning and quality. This is the beauty of chamber music. In order to achieve musical integrity with fellow musicians, one must listen at such an incredible level so as to blend—styles, pitches, phrasing, gestures, indeed, the very conception of the work. Refining attention and intention allows a musician to arrive at a state of communion with others, all who have different but equal musical lines, which come together for the good of the whole. Learning to acknowledge and support other

Above: DePaul Suzuki Strings led by Victoria Vorreiter performing in front of the historic Water Tower in downtown Chicago the week after September 11, 2001.

voices is at the heart of musical harmony. These are the very skills needed to maintain dialogue among the diverse voices of our global village. The ability to attune to the nuances of musical timbre—winds, strings and percussion—becomes a paradigm to harmonize with different peoples of the planet, with varied cultures, traditions and religions.

Dr. Suzuki's vision rises to a new level of relevance at this time when seeking unity at the global level is critical.

moral, and spiritual order by helping to integrate individuals, define communities, and seek unity with nature. Symbols, metaphors, and rituals are crucial in sustaining cohesion and vitality in society—without them there follows uncertainty and disequilibrium, even dissipation. Among the arts, music is arguably the most influential because of the unique nature of tone which is invisible, abstract and dynamic. This allows music to move us physically as vi-

Handel, Vivaldi, and certainly Bach. As students, parents and teacher searched for expressive tone that week, there were few words and many tears. The pieces had not changed from the week before, but their relevance in our lives had shifted and so too had our understanding of them. This was an incredible experience. It seemed we were called to present a concert.

Red, White and Blues

Chicago, home of the Chicago Symphony, the Chicago Blues, and everything in between, is notorious for its energy and entertainment. In fine weather every street corner in the heart of the city is bursting with buskers—Peruvian musicians led by the sounds of a panflute, teenage boys playing buckets like drums, fiddlers, jazz musicians, guitarists, and always somewhere a saxophonist playing "My Kinda' Town." On Sunday, 23 September, a week and a half after the ruin, the city was uncommonly hushed. There were no musicians to be found. There were however great numbers of people who whispered among themselves and seemed to float down the street.

It was an ideal Indian Summer Day, unseasonably warm with a flawless blue sky. Twenty children, dressed in their concert best, and their families and I assembled in the park in front of the famous water tower, on which we draped an American flag. Six small violin cases were lined up in front of our ensemble, supporting placards the children had designed to inform the audience that we were collecting funds for the N.Y. Relief Fund, sponsored by one of our local newspapers. One child had created on his card the motto, "The DePaul Suzuki Strings Care." And another, "United we play, united we stand." Masses of people created an arc around us as we began to perform *The Star-Spangled Banner*, *Ashokan Farewell*, *America, the Beautiful*, *Ode to Joy*, *Amazing Grace*, the *Praeludium* of Shostakovich, the slow movement of the Bach *Concerto for Two Violins*, and *La Folia*, among others. There was an immediate mixture of emotions that were tangible as well as audible. Depending on the style we played, people openly wept or put their hands over hearts or smiled at these fine young people using their talents for such a cause. As four marines passed

The arts offer physical, moral, and spiritual order by helping to integrate individuals, define communities, and seek unity with nature. Symbols, metaphors, and rituals are crucial in sustaining cohesion and vitality in society—without them there follows uncertainty and disequilibrium, even dissipation.

— Victoria Vorreiter

"Our life is worth living only if we love one another and comfort one another. I searched for the meaning of art in music, and it was through music that I found my work and my purpose in life . . . I discovered that the real essence of art was not something high up and far off. It was right inside my ordinary daily self. The very way one greets people and expresses oneself is art. If a musician wants to become a fine artist, he must first become a finer person. If he does this, his worth will appear. It will appear in everything he does, even in what he writes. Art is not in some far-off place. A work of art is the expression of a person's whole personality, sensibility, and ability."

Peace Through Music

For many years I have been researching and speaking about the universal power of music. After all my studies I have come away with the conviction that, as Nietzsche wrote, "Life without music would be a mistake." Aesthetic experience has provided civilizations throughout the ages with the means to express external events and interpret internal revelations. The arts offer physical,

bration, intellectually as it affects the two hemispheres of our brains, and emotionally as it reaches the subconscious. Simply put, music is very special in the way it can touch our bodies, minds and hearts.

Never was the value of the arts more tested than in September, 2001, when inconceivable events left our nation inconsolable. Like countless others I was decimated and unable to carry on life with any semblance of normality. How would it be possible to teach the violin with joy and wonder after such devastation? Music seemed so insignificant at this time. After days of silence and contemplation an answer quietly came. Music may be a way to move through this difficult passage. Melody and rhythm have given voice to and comforted countless breaking hearts in periods of sorrow since time immemorial. I began to play my violin again. What a simple, familiar gesture that gave such personal unspeakable release.

This experience gave me direction and purpose to navigate the coming days. The music lessons I gave were devoted to learning our national hymns and to polishing all the slow movements we so rarely perform at gigs—those of

spontaneous applause erupted. A stream of audience members, young and old, approached our cases to offer donations. It was as if they were grateful to be able to offer something of themselves to something so important. In an hour we raised over \$1,000.

My memory has keenly recorded this as an occasion of vast extremes of emotion, jumbled together for a brief time—tears were mixed with laughter, sorrow with compassion, uncertainty with hope and courage. How and why did these feelings come to be expressed? Was it through a quantifiable combination of tones? Was it through the interpretation of the young musicians? Was it the recall of memory that the music elicited in the listener? Here lies the unfathomable mystery of music.

I remember knowing with such clarity that this was the most significant performance of my life and must be savored. The experience was absolute confirmation of why I teach and live a life of music. Just after the performance I huddled the children together to ask them to be awake at this very moment, to never forget the day when they were four or seven or twelve and had the ability to make a difference. Though they were neither medics or firefighters or relief workers they could equally, actively use their own special skills to make a contribution. Many musicians, Casals, Bernstein, Suzuki among them, understood this use of art in our society. Ability development indeed.

Living Tone

I have witnessed the primal power of music in cultures where rites of passage are still celebrated as they were hundreds, if not thousands, of years ago. At the onset of the twenty-first century as we move towards technological prowess, may we never diminish the role of arts in our lives. Participation in and creation of music, drama, paintings, sculpture, architecture have enormous impact on our psyches. I think that is why 23 September, 2001, left such a profound impression on my Suzuki families and me. We felt complete immersion in the process of grieving, as well as the transcendence that came as a culmination of our will and spirit and feelings in our concert. Art, ours made of living tone, is crucial in our lives—it brings sublime solace and union. It is what makes us human.

All quotes by Shinich Suzuki except as indicated

Victoria Vorreiter, 17 August 2002
Chiang Mai, Thailand

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**"I love it,
love it,
love it!"**

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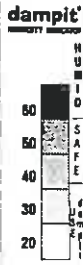
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