
Regional

The story behind SIUE's Suzuki Program

In 1975, Delyte Morris, then president of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, invited John Kendall to begin America's first Suzuki violin teacher training program. The program still today trains children in the Metro East region to play violin, viola and cello. Because children start as young as age 3, the SIUE Suzuki Program has seen generations of children literally grow up since its advent.

Vera McCoy-Sulentic met Kendall at a Suzuki workshop in 1986 and subsequently trained under him as a Suzuki instructor. McCoy-Sulentic was living in Oregon at the time and upon returning from a workshop in Texas proclaimed to her hus-

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band that she wanted to move to Illinois, saying, "I have to study Suzuki with this man!" After graduating in 1988, she stayed in the area. She has been the director of the SIUE Suzuki Strings Program since 1997.

The string method was developed by Shinichi Suzuki in Japan in the 1930s. It is, McCoy-Sulentic said, a worldwide phenomenon with a Suzuki Method teacher in nearly every country. In much the same way they learned a difficult language like Japanese, she added, "[Suzuki] believed that children

could learn music in much the same way, by having it in their environment. He called his method the 'Mother Tongue' method." Today the program at SIUE has 10 professional teachers plus three graduate assistants who teach children as they learn the method over a two-year period.

"In order for this method to grow as much as it has, there has to be quality teacher training," said McCoy-Sulentic. "My graduate students are first accepted into the SIUE music (master degree) program, so they are fine, qualified players. And then they spend two years studying each and every piece in the Suzuki Method, Volumes One through 10, so it is very intensive long-term

training."

The youngest group of children, called "Twinklers" because the first musical piece they learn is "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," begin by singing and holding cardboard violins. They are gradually brought to the instrument, learning to play good quality sounds, bowing technique and more musical works as they improve. Parents attend the lessons and are responsible for the child's listening practice.

"The Suzuki Method uses a triangle," she explained. "It uses the student, parent and teacher as equal parts of an equilateral triangle of learning. Part of the success of the Suzuki Method is that the parents are involved."

Even after 40 years, the program enjoys great community popularity. McCoy-Sulentic notes that as children reach the teenage years, they are able to play in the program's advanced ensemble, called the Tour Group.

"The ensemble has performed in Sweden, Switzerland, Germany and Austria," she said. When asked what their next overseas venue will be, she replied with a smile, "That's still a secret. It hasn't been announced to the kids yet."

The SIUE Suzuki Program website is at: <http://www.siue.edu/artsandsciences/music/suzuki>.

Darryl Coan is chair of the music department at SIUE.



Vera McCoy-Sulentic