



# NEWSLETTER

*Music is the language of the heart without words. - S. Suzuki*



## MTSA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Zachary Ebin, *President*

Fred Sienkiewicz, *Vice President /  
President Elect*

Anne Landis Jetton, *Secretary*

Andra Prewett, *Treasurer*

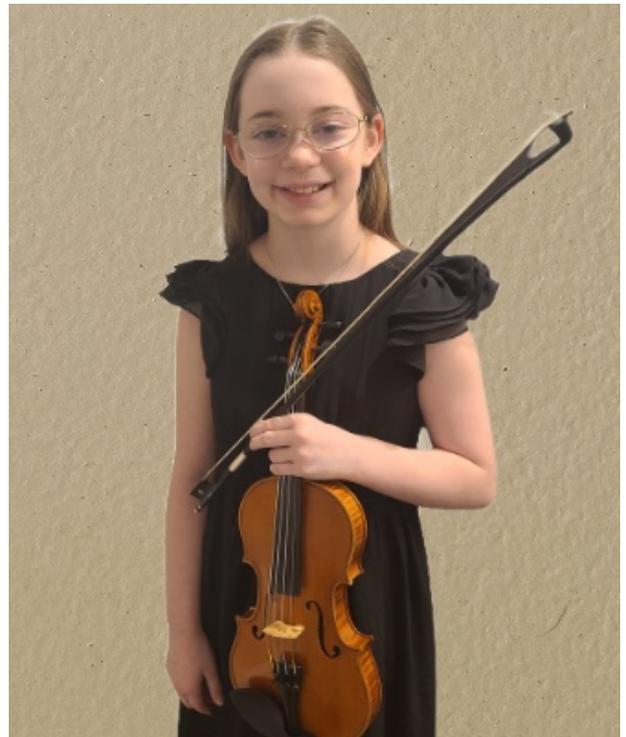
*Members-At-Large:*  
Christia Chambers  
Toni Ferguson  
Deidre Bacco

*Congratulations!*

The MTSA is pleased to announce the winners of the 2023 Concerto Competition! Sofia Jenson and Kylie Hayter were selected to perform with our teacher orchestra at the MTSA Honors Recital on Feb. 5th, 2023. Kylie will perform the first movement of Vivaldi's Concerto in G minor and Sofia will perform the third movement of Vivaldi's Concerto in A minor.



Sofia Jenson, student of Christina McGann



Kylie Hayter, student of Ching-Yi Lin

# On Playing By Ear

**FRED SIENKIEWICZ**

One of the beautiful aspects of the Suzuki pedagogy is the emphasis on playing by ear. As a brass performer/teacher and a classroom ear training professor at Vanderbilt University, how we use our “ears” is something I think about a lot. I just finished reading Ed Kreitman’s *Teaching From The Balance Point* (Illinois: Western Springs School of Talent Education, 1998), in which he makes a point that has completely shaken up my approach to the idea of playing by ear.

First, a distinction: Musicians and teachers frequently talk about our *ear* or *inner hearing*, but I prefer the phrase *inner singing*. While hearing is passive in nature, inner singing is an active process in which we intentionally imagine the desired sound, and use that as the target for what we are trying to achieve on the instrument. As a teacher, good inner singing is one of the most important teaching points in any piece. The strength of inner singing affects every aspect of how we learn, process, and interact musically, and cultivating a singing-led approach (sometimes also called *sound-first*) alleviates many difficulties.

In the chapter *Rote vs. Note*, Kreitman describes how he works with students to learn the notes to a new piece. His approach begins by outlining three possible sources of learning the notes to a piece: by rote, by reading, or by ear. I’ll begin by paraphrasing his breakdown:

**Learning by rote** could be thought of as memorizing “the directions” for a piece: first play two open As, then play two open Es, then play two E string-first fingers, then play a long open E (i.e. the beginning of Twinkle). You could figure out the directions by watching your teacher and copying visually, or maybe a teacher or parent verbally spells it out. While it’s important to know the sequence of physical motor actions to a piece, it is also possible to work in this way with weak or absent inner singing.

**Learning by reading** is like learning by rote, except the instructions are encoded into the symbols of musical notation. As you read the notes and rhythms on the page, they tell you what to do next, and you just execute them. It is not an uncommon challenge in sight-reading to approach the activity as a series of fingerings and bowings without a clear or accurate inner singing.

**Learning by ear** is using the sound of your inner singing of the music as your guide. You discover for yourself how to make the instrument match the sounds you already have in your head. It’s almost like a puzzle where you have to figure out the answers yourself rather than letting a teacher or the “answer key” of the sheet music tell you where to press your fingers.

How do we develop this inner singing? And how do we use it to figure out the notes to a piece? The most common method is just listening to the Suzuki recordings over and over until the piece is stuck in your head. The best way to check your inner singing is to sing it out loud. If you listen to the recording every day, it usually won’t take long before you can begin singing it with great accuracy. For myself, I won’t try to play a new passage or piece of music until I can sing it, and I (usually) hold my students to the same standard.

Once we can sing it clearly and accurately, Kreitman proposes a simple procedure to deduce the notes of the piece. First three skills are needed: 1) the ability to compare two notes and tell if they’re the same or different; 2) the ability to compare two different notes and tell if the second is higher or lower; 3) enough knowledge of the instrument to know how to play up and down from a note (e.g. scales).

Once those skills are in place, he suggests working through a piece in terms of the direction of the pitches: for each “next note”, is it the same, higher, or lower than the last one? He doesn’t say it, but I suggest doing this work in very small doses—one phrase or one part of a phrase at a time. When you have a map of the same/higher/lowers worked out, then experiment through trial and error on your instrument to figure out the starting pitch and each next pitch. Slowly, one note at a time, you’ll teach yourself the notes that go with the sounds of your inner singing.

One of the most important aspects of good musicianship is that the inner singing drives the approach to making music. In the suggested procedures of *Teaching from the Balance Point*, the first step to learning a new piece is cultivating a strong and accurate inner singing. Then, even as the rote knowledge of the notes is discovered and cemented into muscle memory, the knowledge of the notes and motor actions is in the correct orientation for excellent music-making: muscle memory as the means to the end of realizing the inner singing.

How do you learn a new piece by ear? Or how do you teach students in your studio how to cultivate their inner singing? Or do you have questions about how to better cultivate this inner singing? I’d love to hear from you! Email me at [fred.sienkiewicz@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:fred.sienkiewicz@vanderbilt.edu) and I’ll share your tips, ideas, and questions in the next MTSA newsletter!

A poster for a Suzuki Playdown event. The background is a gradient of purple, blue, and orange, with a black silhouette of a violin on the left. At the top left is the Austin Peay State University logo (AP Clarksville Tennessee). At the top right is the Middle Tennessee Suzuki Association (MTSA Suzuki Assoc.) logo. The main title 'Suzuki Playdown' is written in a large, white, cursive font. Below the title, the event details are listed: 'February 26th | 3:00pm', 'Mabry Concert Hall, Austin Peay State University', and 'Corner of 8th and Marion, Clarksville, TN'. At the bottom left is a QR code, and at the bottom right is the text 'For information and registration visit: www.middletnsuzuki.org/Events'.

# ViolinFest 2022

*DEIDRE BACCO*

The weekend of November 18-19, some students & I were fortunate to attend WKU's ViolinFest in Bowling Green, KY. It was an outstanding event, organized by Dr. Ching-Yi Lin with exceptional clinicians, Grigory Kalinovsky, Christina McGann, Geoffrey Herd, Emily Crane, Andrew Braddock and Aleka Chau. ViolinFest included a brilliant opening faculty performance, a range of informative Suzuki group classes and masterclass-style lessons for students from pre-Twinkle through Suzuki violin book 4, an illuminating day-long series of public masterclasses for collegiate and advanced young students with the acclaimed teacher Grigory Kalinovsky, and a joyful closing concert, performed by the participating students.

ViolinFest was kicked off, Friday evening, with a superb Faculty Recital. The program included an amazing performance of the Quartet for Four Violins by Grazyna Bacewicz, performed by Grigory Kalinovsky, Christina McGann, Geoffrey Herd, and Ching-Yi Lin. Next, Kalinovsky and pianist Alessandra Volpi presented Brahms's "Thun" Sonata, No. 2. The program concluded with Moritz Moszkowski's lively and tuneful four-movement Suite for Two Violins and Piano, performed by Kalinovsky, Lin, and Volpi. What a beautiful evening of music.

Saturday morning's ViolinFest began at 9am with a Pre-Twinkle Group Class, taught by Andrew Braddock (Western Kentucky University faculty) and Aleka Chau (Western Kentucky University senior). At 10am, Dr. Emily Crane (Austin Peay State University) worked with Book 4 students, polishing Seitz's Concerto No. 5, movement 1, followed by two masterclass lessons. At 11am, Dr. Crane led students in the Praeludium and Gavotte movements from Shostakovich's Violin Duo and Piano. After lunch, classes resumed with Dr. Christina McGann (Vanderbilt University), leading a Book 3 Group Class on Martini's Gavotte and Bach's Gavotte in G minor, followed by two individual masterclass-style lessons from that group, a Book 2 Group Class on Musette and Hunter's Chorus, again followed by two students for individual masterclasses, and lastly, a Book 1 Group Class on Twinkle, Lightly Row, Song of the Wind, Go Tell Aunt Rhody, and Allegro, followed by more individual masterclasses.

Simultaneously, in an adjacent WKU building on campus, Grigory Kalinovsky (Indiana University) shared his expertise, teaching masterclasses for select students from WKU, Louisville Academy of Music, Vanderbilt University, UT Knoxville, University of Louisville, and Belmont University. Students performed and were coached on parts of Wieniawski's Concerto No. 2; De Beriot's Concerto No. 9; William Kroll's Banjo & Fiddle; Mozart's Concerto No. 4; Ellen Zwillich's Fantasy for Solos Violin; Paganini's Caprice No 1; Vieuxtemps's Violin Concerto No 5; Brahms's Violin Concerto; Haydn's Concerto in G Major; Bach's D minor Sarabande; Ysaye's Ballade; Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto; and Sibelius's Violin Concerto. Kalinovsky is a masterful teacher and many students, parents, and teachers were able to experience these amazing lessons and performances by very talented young musicians.

The ViolinFest concluded with a concert for all participants at 5pm in WKU's Fine Arts Center's Recital Hall. The program began with the Suzuki Book 1 Group, performing Twinkle, Lightly Row, Song of the Wind, Go Tell Aunt Rhody, and Allegro, pieces they had worked on, earlier in their class. Next, the Beginner Group dazzled us with the Ant Song, GDG, AEA, and the White Squirrel song. It can be invaluable for all the musicians present to be reminded where their instrumental journey began. The program continued with the

Book 2 Group, (Musette, Hunter's Chorus) and the Book 3 Group, (Martini Gavotte and Bach Gavotte in G minor). Solo performers were featured next, with Benedict Ancell (Nashville) performing Paganini's Witches Dance and Simon Ancell (Nashville) performing Brahms Waltz, followed by the Book 4 Group, performing Seitz's Concerto No 5, movement 1. A series of brilliant solos followed, with Michael Sheng (Nashville), playing Seitz Concerto No. 5, 3rd movement, Kylie Hayter (Bowling Green), presenting De Beriot's Violin Concerto No. 9, 1st movement, Sofia Jenson (Nashville), performing Ten Have's Allegro Brillante, Eric Jenson (Nashville), presenting Haydn's Concerto in G Major, 1st movement, Emily Fischer (Louisville), playing Wieniawski Concerto No 2, movement 1, and Isabella Nguyen (Nashville), performing the 1st movement of the Sibelius Violin Concerto. The concert concluded with the Shostakovich Group Glass, performing the Praeludium and Gavotte. Bravo to all performers.

What an amazing experience for the students, parents and teachers who attended, myself included. This was my first time at WKU's ViolinFest. I look forward to returning and encouraging more students to attend next year.



# From the Archives: Butter Boxes (November, 1987)

*KRISTINE HAGLUND*

As far as I know, I am one of a select few people who realize the significance of butter boxes in international relations. On my fifth birthday, I took my first music lesson, practicing on a butter box with a ruler taped on, so that I would be able to hold a real violin. This introduction to music was the beginning of a hobby that has brought me real joy, as well as opportunities for lasting friendships and a sharpened intellect. I think that my musical training gives a unique twist to my approach to international relations, because it has taught me to communicate with people on a level that transcends even language and speaks directly to the soul.

Once I got past the butter box stage and began to play a real violin—a tiny instrument one sixteenth the size of an adult’s—I quickly realized that it was not just another toy. By the time an experienced listener could make out “Go Tell Aunt Rhody,” I was quite attached to the little box, and as the music I play has become more complicated, it has become an essential part of me. When I am angry or frustrated, playing my violin is more comforting than anything in the world, and I can express happiness more effectively by playing a gigue or a rondo than talking. The happiest moments in my life have been the few times I’ve felt that I was really making music, and that my audience had become lost in the music with me. The most exciting musical experience is playing in an orchestra. I can think of nothing more thrilling than an orchestra that is really making music—seventy people defying all the laws of a universe which tends toward highest entropy and lowest energy to create an intricately ordered group of sounds with an incredible intensity.

Playing in orchestras has also given me opportunities to meet many different kinds of people. I have learned to get along with people that I might have avoided getting to know if I hadn’t had to work with them to make music. My best friend in the world is someone I would never have gotten to know if she had not been my stand partner. Sharing a love of music forms an instant bond which can transcend personal differences and provide a basis for a deeper friendship than ordinary high school experiences.

I am certain that playing the violin has made me more intelligent, or at least more capable of using my brain, than I would have been without my musical training. The mental discipline required to learn and remember where the fingers go, how the bow must be drawn, how long notes are held, etc., and still pay attention to the phrasing, dynamics, and feeling of a piece stretches the mind’s capacity. I find that after an hour of mental gymnastics in a performance or practice session, I am more aware of everything and I can express myself more clearly than at any other time. Even though I have decided not to become a professional musician, I plan to continue learning to play violin. I can no longer say that playing the violin is a hobby. Music is simply a part of me.

Kristine Haglund is presently [Nov. 1987] a freshman majoring in international relations at Boston University. She studied violin with Mary Helen Law and Connie Heard before she graduated from Brentwood High School in May of 1987.

# Ten Tips to Make Practicing with your Child Easier!

**ZACHARY EBIN**

Practicing with children is difficult, really difficult. There is complaining, arguing, and days when I feel like we should just quit. And if I did not love my children as much as I do, I would stop. But I know when we practice my children become accomplished learners and skilled musicians. I know that they develop many skills that will help both in the realm of music and with everything else that they do later in life. So, the struggle continues. While I do not have a solution to make practicing easy, I have accumulated over my years as a Suzuki student, teacher, and parent some tips for making it easier. Below are my top ten favorites.

**1. Practice every day.** Children thrive on routine. When children expect that they will practice, they will resist it less. When practicing does not occur every day, the child sees the activity as being arbitrarily selected or optional and will then resist. Further, when we practice every day, the playing gets easier, and when it is easier the children argue less. When we skip a day of practice, the playing feels harder and more unpleasant. Sometimes, it can be helpful to think of daily practice as a skill in itself that needs to be practiced. When you have one of those days, when nothing seems to be going right (and yes, all Suzuki parents have them) tell yourself, today we are just practicing daily practice. Use this strategy to get through a few tough days, and you will start to see your children have not only developed the skill of daily practice, but they have improved as a musician as well.

**2. Practice in the morning.** When children come home from school, they are tired. When parents come home from work, they are tired. Combining a tired parent with a tired child for a complex cooperative activity will often result in conflict. But if we practice in the morning children are fresh and ready to learn. When I make this suggestion to most parents, they tell me it is too hard, the morning is too crazy. But then they try it, and it works! I find my children accomplish twice as much in morning practice than in the afternoon. Further, we do not have other activities scheduled in the morning so there are never schedule conflicts. This allows us to practice every day (see tip no. 1). For children there is an added benefit of a finish time. We have to stop practicing when it is time to get ready for school. When children know there is a time when practicing stops, and that we will not go on for some unknown amount of time (an eternity in their mind), they are much more cooperative.

**3. Review, review, review!** Playing a musical instrument is difficult. Learning new repertoire and skills is hard. Children resist things that are hard for them. Review is easy. And even better, when we do review the new music and skills become easier. If you include lots of review in your practice sessions children will find practicing is easy and they will resist it less. I highly recommend a practice plan where review makes up 80% of practice time, and no more than 20% of practice time is devoted to new music and skills. When too much practice time is spent on what is new, children struggle and get frustrated. When practicing is easy, they enjoy it more and progress faster.

**4. Listen more to the repertoire!** If you are struggling to practice with your child, perhaps the easiest thing to change is listen more. Listen to your repertoire in the car, at bedtime, at meals, as much as you can. When children (and parents too) have the repertoire thoroughly ingrained in their minds, the learning and playing will become easier. When the practicing gets easier there will be less resistance and arguing. If you catch yourself humming your children's repertoire while accomplishing other tasks, then you know the music is inside you and you are listening enough.

**5. Attend more events!** One of the greatest benefits of studying an instrument through the Suzuki Method is that you are joining a global community. Many Suzuki Programs and Associations hold concerts, play-ins, workshops, and more (See the MTSA website for events in our area). These events are exciting and fun. When your child experiences a fun event with their instrument they will want to practice more. The more they practice the more fun they can have, and a wonderful cycle develops. More practicing makes more fun, more fun makes more practicing.

**6. Summer Study.** Summer is an amazing opportunity for music students. No school, no homework, and parents with lighter work schedules, can mean more time to devote to music. I find students who keep up their practicing in the summer can make just as much progress between June and August as they can during the academic year. By contrast students who take the summer off, lose their skills and spend the first two months of study in the fall dedicated to rebuilding their skills to where they were the previous June.

**7. Attend a Suzuki Institute or Music Camp.** One of the challenges faced by Suzuki students is that their local friends often do not have to practice. They feel like they are the only ones tortured by their parents in this way. I highly recommend taking a week or two, or more and immersing yourself in a community where all of the children play music. You will make friends that last a lifetime. You will have fun and your children will grow as musicians. Your children will be excited to continue their work during the year so they can be put in the next level group class at the institute. There are now over 70 Suzuki Summer Institutes in North America. Pick one close to you to make it easier, or pick one in an exotic place to make it an adventure!

**8. Be Positive!** As a parent it can be easy to slip into constant criticism. Your child plays and you tell them to fix their posture, correct the notes, play with more phrasing and more. You are not wrong, and your motivation is selfless. You are trying to help your child play better. But remember, no one likes being criticized all the time. I find it helpful to only offer a correction after two positive comments. When your children are told how well they are doing they will be more open to improving. When they are only told what they are doing wrong, practicing becomes unpleasant. Positive comments are even more inspiring when you praise specific things. Instead of saying “you sound good,” try saying “I really liked the way you incorporated more dynamic contrast into your second phrase.” You can get even more benefit from positive comments when you praise the effort rather than the results. Instead of saying, “your scales are much better today,” try saying “When you played your scale slowly and carefully, your intonation was much better!”

**9. Practice what the Teacher Assigns.** Remember, you have a highly trained teacher. They know what to do next to help your child get to the next level. Sometimes as a parent, it can be easy to add assignments that the teacher did not assign or try to correct things that the teacher is not currently focusing on. However, this can overwhelm children and make them feel like there is a never-ending list of things to accomplish. By contrast when you create a list of assignments that were assigned by the teacher, you can become a supportive collaborator. Approach practicing as a partnership where you will support your child in accomplishing what the teacher has assigned. Once the goals are accomplished, you can be done.

**10. Incentives.** I love teaching, I really do. But there are days when I am tired or cranky and I do not want to do it. But I get paid to teach, so I go do it anyway. After I arrive at my studio, the first student comes in. I start working with them, and I get excited. I am reminded that I love teaching. While I love teaching, it was the paycheck that got me over the hump and into my studio. Practicing can be the same with children. They may love making music, but in one particular instance they do not feel like practicing. So use incentives to get

over the hump. Make sure that the incentives are small, tangible, and immediate. Instead of making a chart where after three months the child earns a trip to Disney World, tell them if they practice today, they will get a dollar. Try to make incentives objective rather than subjective. Instead of “If you play Lightly Row really beautifully today, I will give you a dollar,” try “If you do your assignments today you will earn a dollar.”

Practicing is hard, but there are ways to make it easier. Remember the day will come when your child will perform a great masterwork. They will look for you in the audience and feel a wonderful sense of gratitude for the incredible gift of music you have provided for them. Happy practicing!

# MTSA ANNOUNCEMENTS

## 1. Scholarships Deadline — February 1

MTSA Summer Scholarship Applications are due February 1st, 2023.

Visit the MTSA website for full information and to apply.

## 2. The MTSA Honors Recital — February 5

The honors recital will take place on Sunday February 5, 2023 at 2pm at the St. Cecilia Academy. We hope to see you there!

Full Details at the MTSA website.

## 3. The MTSA Winter-Play Down — February 26

The MTSA Winter play down will be on Sunday February 26, 2023 at APSU. For more information and to register please visit the MTSA website.

Full information and register to attend.

## 4. Share something in this newsletter!

If you would like to submit an article, artwork, a composition, or anything else that can be printed in 2d to the newsletter please write: [president@middletnsuzuki.org](mailto:president@middletnsuzuki.org).