



Newsletter

Using Recordings of Non-classical Music as a Teaching/Learning Tool

By Julie Gorka

(Author's Note: I am writing this for teachers, parents and students because I think anyone who plays any instrument can learn from recordings. This is supposed to be a piano division column, but I am also a Ceffic fiddler and have referred to fiddling often in this article because of its obvious relevance to the topic. But it works just as well for pianists, tuba players, harpists, etc.)

We all know that musicians benefit from the Suzuki approach of immersion-listening, both of a working piece and of any other classical music. So much more is conveyed than what is actually on the printed page of music. But many other types of music have always counted on being passed around by listening and demonstration rather than manuscript. Traditional fiddle music has floated from fiddler to fiddler (with banjos in between, and whatever other instruments happened to be nearby) from town to town, and country to country. Fiddle tunes were learned and demonstrated by other fiddlers. Jazz music and theory can be taught on paper, but the styles are absorbed by listening to other jazz pianists. Performance comes from creative applications of the performer's favorite sounds, not from a page of music.

Appalachian fiddlers in the past had only one way to learn new tunes: to listen to other fiddle players. It must have been a thrill one someone's fiddling uncle from far away came to visit and brought some new tunes -kind of like driving down to Foxes Music for a new book of music. But now, with the proliferation of recordings of all types of music, musicians have a limitless resource for learning music of any type.

Why learn from recordings? Reason # 1: it's fun. It's a thrill to get whatever you've been listening to out of your head and onto your instrument. Students love it, and even (and especially) busy teens will find time between rock-climbing lessons and AP Stone Carving to sit down at the piano. Reason #2: It's useful. Not everything has been written down, but that doesn't have to stop you.

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String/Flute Institute Coming Up

There is still time to enroll in SAGWA's Greater Washington Suzuki Institute for strings and flute to be held June 20-24, at Catholic University in the District.

The Suzuki Institute is designed for music students, their families, and teachers who desire a week-long study of the philosophy and pedagogy of Shinichi Suzuki. As a supplement to year-round lessons, the institute provides participants with a concentrated week of private and group instruction, motivation, and enjoyment. Student levels range from pre-Twinkle through book 10 and beyond.

For teachers, this year's Institute offers training for Violin Book 1 B, Violin Book 5, Violin Overview, and Cello Overview. In addition, the following teacher enrichment courses will be offered:

- *Bach at All Ages: From Book One through Chaconne* with Katie Lansdale (beginning June 19-June 23)
- *Rudiments of the Jazz and Blues* with Randy Sabien

Student and teacher scholarships are available from SAGWA and are based on need. See the Scholarship Application form.

For more institute brochures/registration forms, contact Florence Kwok, 5109 Philip Rd. Annandale, VA. 22003. Phone (703) 256-30310 Fax (703) 256-6363

Calendar of Events

String Festival	May 6-7
String Institute	June 20-24
Piano Institute	June 25-29

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Using Recordings of Non-classical Music

If it's recorded, you can play it (of course, with SOME limitations and, sometimes, some creative arranging). Reason #3: It's educational. This is without a doubt the easiest, most fun way to get students to learn harmony, increase their musical memories, keep them from being hooked on the printed page, learn to improvise, move comfortably into the odder keys and modes (which may not be odd for trumpets, lutes, guitars) keep a steady rhythm (it's almost like using a metronome), learn to listen to other musicians and play along with them.

How To:

The ingredients you will need to follow this recipe are: a CD that you like/love (tapes are fine, as are LP's, but both are harder to use), your instrument, and your CD player. A boom box is ideal because it can be moved around, and many have the feature of being able to fast-forward and reverse within a track, making it easier to find a specific spot.

If you are new to this, and, particularly, if you haven't played by ear much (or at all) you should choose a CD that's in a simple style and simple keys. Something like "We Sing Campfire Songs" or something folksy with some slow tunes on it. (Slow is good!) Generally most folk-guitar recordings are in accessible keys to both pianos and violins. If you're interested in fiddling, try any of Bill Spence's All Stars recordings. They have great taste in tunes and have recorded tunes that are in the mainstream of New England fiddling repertoire.

Then listen to your chosen CD about 1,000 times, a la Suzuki. You know how that works. Kathy Kerr, a fiddler, always says that when she can hum the tune, she knows she'll be able to play it. If you can't hum it, you probably haven't really absorbed it yet.

Now start your CD, and try to play along with the melody of the beginning of the tune. The first time, you may not figure out anything more than the key, or maybe not even that! The process improves dramatically over time, so that you'll learn tunes faster and faster--this is a skill, not a mysterious in-born trait. But at first, you have to work it out little by little. Try just a little of the tune, out of which you might hardly get a note right. Go back to the beginning and try again. Resist the urge to write anything down. (Some people write down the first measure or two so they'll remember how the tune starts, but no more. It's called a Cheat Sheet and is a good memory tool.) Be patient and keep trying.

Once you are comfortable playing the melody, you can try the chords. (You can also do it the other way around, beginning with finding the chords and then adding the melody, as I prefer to do. If you are chord-fluent, that's

the easiest way to proceed. If not, you're better off starting with the tune.) The common chords in every key are the I, V and V7, so you can do some creative guess-work and those chords will likely be in your tune somewhere. Keep listening to the CD while you play; sometimes the chord may be different, or just more complex, but one of the three basic chords may suffice. Different styles of music have characteristic chords and harmonies, and you will quickly become more aware of what those are.

Jazz can be the hardest type of music to work out by ear because of its complexity. However, 12-bar blues and boogies with their patterned left hands can be quite user-friendly, and kids love them. Whether you like jazz or not, the 12-bar blues is a great way to introduce the I-IV-V concept to kids. All the chords are in root position, so there's no need to explain inversions. Also, kids will actually listen to you when you explain it, because they want to learn how to play blues and rock tunes that they've heard. Kids have an unerring sense for what's cool.

Once you've gotten the melody and the chords worked out for your chosen tune, you might just choose to stop right there. Maybe that's enough. Or maybe it's not, and you want to go for excellence. Then you have a choice. You can attempt to pick up on the details conveyed by the music, like the mood, the instrumentation, the bass line, the form, dynamics, and ornamentation. How would you duplicate on the piano what the flute part is doing in your recording? Is it worth it? Does it sound good? Do you like the way the ornaments sound, and want to add them as is? The more you listen, the more you'll hear.

It's not necessary, however, to try to make your version as close to the recorded version as possible. You could do that as an exercise, or because you like the way it's done, or you want to learn how to do it that way. You can borrow another artist's idea and apply it to other tunes, making it your own. Or you can completely ignore everything but the skeleton of the tune and go off on your own tangent. You are allowed. You are encouraged to -it's that type of music! If you feel like it, you can change tempos, keys, chords, mood, meter you name it. Other people may or may not like the results (I have had students come up with some really WILD stuff in the name of creativity -it's fun/funny to do that, and very freeing, but not always performable) but it's yours to "play" with as you like.

Younger kids do not often have the patience to use recordings. But you can help them develop their listening skills by helping them (but not too much!) pick out by ear simple tunes like Camptown Races, The Lion Sleeps Tonight, Happy Birthday, the theme from Gilligan's Island anything they like to listen to and sing. Help them find a manageable key to start in (though it's really good to move away from C and G before they are reading a lot, before they find out that A flat is "hard") and sing along while they hunt for notes.

Happy listening!

New SAGWA Brochures Available

SAGWA has just printed new brochures about the Suzuki Method and our organization. Teachers are encouraged to use them to promote SAGWA membership in their studios. In addition, they can be placed in music stores or other locations for publicity. Contact Linda Gutterman at 703-979-6635 to receive copies for your studio.

Teachers Looking for Students

If you have friends or neighbors who are new in the area, please have them call (202) 723-1237 for SAGWA's Suzuki teacher referral help. They will be given the phone number of one of the non-teaching parents who is able to answer questions and has up-to-date teacher information.

Also, the following Suzuki teachers have studio space available for new students. Teachers are listed by instrument with one-word descriptions for studio requirements (Inter - interview required; Aud = audition required; Obser = Observation required; minimum age and maximum age for beginning students). If you want your name to appear on this list, you must submit separate Teacher Referral Forms for each issue of the newsletter. The deadlines for submitting this form are the same as for news items (see schedule on last page).

Violin

Holly Fussell, 4601 Sleaford Rd., Annandale, VA 22003
(703) 503-4442
Interview, Ages 4-Adult

Jim Ling, 8802 Kenilworth Dr., Springfield, VA 22151
(703) 426-1894
Ages 4-Adult

Eva Syrova, 6618 Boulevard View, Apt. A1, Alexandria, VA 22307, (703) 660-9169 (also studio in Arlington)
Interview; Ages 5-Adult

Viola

Holly Fussell, 4601 Sleaford Rd., Annandale, VA 22003
(703) 503-4442
Interview; Ages 4-Adult

Jim Ling, 8802 Kenilworth Dr., Springfield, VA 22151
(703) 426-1894
Ages 4-Adult

“Music is the universal language of mankind.”

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Suzuki Piano Teacher Wanted

SUZUKI PIANO TEACHER POSITION OPEN FALL 2000. Interested applicants, please send resume, cover letter to

Performing Arts Academy or
Attn: Jeannie Lee Fax: 703 803 7512
4265-b Brookfield Corp. Dr.
Chantilly Va. 20151

ASTA Certificate Program

By Lya Stem

The Certificate Program, of the American String Teachers Association, MD/DC, is now in its third year. Over 140 students, representing thirteen studio teachers participated in the year-end assessment exams last June. The 1 0-level program provides valuable guidance for the teacher in setting technical and musical goals; it responds appropriate material, including the Suzuki repertoire; and is a wonderful motivating tool for the student.

The ASTA National Committee on Studio Instruction found the program worthy of dissemination on a wider basis and invited Lya Stem, chair of the Certificate Program, to present it at the National String Teachers Forum in May 2000 in Bloomington, IN. Along the same lines, in recognition of Lya's work in creating and setting up the program in MD/DC, The National Executive Board will present her with the Excellence in Leadership Award on March 10, at the 2000 National Conference of ASTA with NSOA in Washington, DC.

This year the exams are scheduled for June 10 and 11 at Catholic University. The deadline for applications is May 1.

We hope you too will find this a valuable opportunity. For complete program and further information please call Lya Stem: 301-320-5618

Instruments for Sale

Just a reminder that SAGWA members can place free classified ads in this newsletter to sell instruments.

Correction to Annual Membership Directory

In the membership directory issue of the Newsletter, Cynthia Stoop should have been listed as a cello teacher as well as a piano teacher. In addition, her correct phone number is (301) 365-0436.

We apologize for any inconvenience.