

## Edmonton Suzuki Flute and Recorder Society

### Music Director's report, September 2016

Our upcoming 2016-2017 season marks the 10th anniversary of the ESFRS incorporation as a non-profit Society according to the requirements of the Province of Alberta. I would like to take this opportunity to summarize what we have accomplished over the last 10 years.

We have seen many changes over the last 10 years. We started with only one group class for each instrument - now we have many levels of group. The first class was mostly beginners, of course, since we had just started - ten years has just been long enough for some of these first beginners to complete the program and take teacher training themselves. Teacher training for flute involved travelling 3,500 km, and recorder training 2,300 km ten years ago - now we have a local Suzuki Institute and teachers can stay home while we bring the trainers to them. Ten years ago we had paper registration forms and everyone paid with cheques - now the registration form is on line and 2/3 of our students pay with some form of automatic electronic payment.

Ten years ago, I was the only Suzuki Association of the Americas trained Suzuki Recorder teacher in Canada, and the only SAA trained Suzuki Flute teacher active west of Ontario. At that point, the demand for Suzuki method instruction on flute and recorder had exceeded what one teacher could supply. I had a choice: create a waiting list for my private studio, or create a community that would increase the supply of trained teachers to meet the demand. My first thought was to check with the other Suzuki organizations in the city, to see if any of them would be interested in adding flute and recorder to their roster of instrument instruction. Unfortunately, they all had their hands full dealing with the instruments that they already were teaching. So I gathered together a group of parents from my private studio, and we filled out the incorporation documents to become a non-profit society known as the Edmonton Suzuki Flute & Recorder Society.

### The ESFRS program for students:

Our program is based on a process: the mother-tongue method of music instruction as developed by Shinichi Suzuki. Our goal is to help our students and their parents understand a process of learning that will help them reach a high level of ability in musical performance and creative expression, as well as develop positive character traits, or as Dr. Suzuki would say, "a beautiful heart". This process uses a language learning model, reproducing the same steps that an infant will take when learning to speak its native language.



Shinichi Suzuki working with a young violin student.



ESFRS teacher Kathleen Schoen receiving SAA Certificate of Achievement at the 2015 Leadership Retreat

The Suzuki approach gives our teachers a framework in which they can create an individualized program of study for each student. The language learning model ensures that every student will take all the steps required to develop ability, but it remains flexible enough to incorporate the wide variety of ideas and experience brought to the process by individual teachers. The more training and experience our teachers have, the more creative approaches they can take with each student, and parents, students and teachers will share a strong sense of personal achievement.

We recognize the importance of a student's environment as part of the learning process. This is why we have both individual lessons and group lessons. The individual lessons develop the relationship between the student, teacher, and parent, setting up an environment where students can learn at their own pace. The group lesson harnesses the sense of community to foster teamwork and performance in a safe space that can expand to include local, national, and international opportunities.



Young flute student working with her mother during group lesson.



Students playing at the LRT station as part of the Bach in the Subways celebration

Our emphasis on process means that we do not create large performance events as goals. Performances are frequent, combining both informal community events and formal concerts. Students perform what they are ready to perform at that time, as a celebration of student accomplishment so far. There is no pushing to have a specific piece ready for a specific event. This approach produces confident performers who perform polished pieces in a musically expressive manner. This ease of musical performance led to our invitation to perform with the ESO last June, along with soloist Carol Wincenc.

A key component of the language learning model is listening to reference recordings of the music. It is generally recognized that a language immersion program is the best way to learn a second language, because you are exposed to the sound of the language in use constantly. Music can also be a second language, and students learn to speak it fluently if they hear it often from an early age. The listening also fosters independent work. If a student hears the reference recording often enough to remember the piece in his own memory, that memory will give immediate positive feedback every time the student practices correctly. That positive feedback comes from within the student, much faster than from a parent or teacher. Our goal is to develop students who can work with that sense of intent from within themselves.



ESFRS students on the Winspear stage with the ESO and Carol Wincenc.



ESFRS recorder student with two recorder students from Huancavelica, Peru, at the SAA Conference.

Our students compare favourably to students in other Suzuki programs in North and South America. They have auditioned successfully for international groups and masterclasses at SAA Conference, where they have had opportunities to play in classes for internationally renowned soloists and in groups with other students from the United States, Peru, and Brazil.

When our students do pace themselves against the traditional competitive model of music instruction they do very well. We have had students win the Provincial level of the Alberta Music Festival, named scholarship competitions at Edmonton Kiwanis Festival, and silver medals for the highest mark in the province

on the Royal Conservatory examinations.



ESFRS recorder student playing in masterclass for the world famous recorder soloist, Paul Leenhouts.



ESFRS students are 4 of the 6 students who received scholarships at the 2015 Kiwanis music festival.

Students have also been invited to participate in international events such as the Montreal International Recorder Festival.

### What the Society does:

There were three main issues that our Society had to deal with when it was formed, and these issues are still ongoing administrative priorities of ESFRS as it moves into its 10th anniversary year:

1. Access to SAA Teacher Training (part of maintaining the quality of the program for the students)
2. Finances (keeping the costs down for participating families)
3. Facility (having a place in which to provide our program)

## **1. Access to Training**

The first issue that we had to deal with as a Society was the accessibility of SAA Teacher Training. The only flute courses available in Canada were in Hamilton and Montreal, and the only recorder courses at that time were in San Fransisco. Taking one of these courses was an investment of several thousand dollars for an individual teacher, mostly in travel and accommodation costs. We did two things to assist teachers to access training:

- A. We created a Professional Development fund to subsidize teachers travel, accommodation, and tuition expenses for attending teacher training courses and conferences.
- B. We cooperated with the local Suzuki Summer Institute, providing volunteer support in return for flute or recorder training courses to be added to the roster of their summer program at U of A

These two initiatives were very successful. We have increased the supply of trained teachers in the Edmonton area to the point where we actually have one who has qualified as a SAA Teacher Trainer. This has allowed us to host a local institute with a local trainer, increasing access to training at the same time as reducing travel costs. This Trainer has also been working internationally, having been invited to provide training courses in the United States, Australia, Ecuador, and Peru. The quality of programming for our students has been enriched by having a teacher in our program who has an international reputation as an expert in the field.

## **2. Finances**

Our next step was to find additional sources of funding to supplement the tuition fees paid by the parents. As a non-profit society, we qualify for operating grants from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts and the Edmonton Arts Council. The grant application forms are rather complex and intimidating, especially the first year you apply, as you are required to have two years of financial records as well as estimated hours of volunteer participation and other supporting documents. It took a few years to get all the records in order to apply for the AFA grant, but we were successful and have been receiving an operating grant now for three years. We have yet to submit an application for the EAC operating grant. We did submit an application for a small project grant, which was unsuccessful. The application process for the different organizations that provide grants are all quite different, so it takes some time to prepare a successful application, especially the first time.

Another source of funding which we have considered is fundraising. The general feeling from most of our member families is that most would prefer to pay a few extra dollars tuition in lieu of participating in the typical fundraising activities like selling chocolates, etc. Unfortunately, participation in fundraising efforts is what usually generates the most volunteer activity for non-profit societies, and volunteer activity is one of the things that is considered in grant applications. We did try to track volunteer activity by requesting a volunteer deposit in the form of a post dated cheque that would be returned once the volunteer duty was complete. This is a model used by many non-profits. Unfortunately, the hours spent recording the cheques and tracking the volunteers were taking time away from program planning for the students and not making a significant increase to our available funds. So we opted to try to create a culture within our society where folks just pitch in if they see a need, without requiring a monetary deposit. This has been quite successful. Not

everyone can help out all the time, but those who can't don't feel like they are paying for the privilege of not being helpful.

We have also considered soliciting donations, but we are not able to provide tax receipts for donations, as we are not registered as a charity, just as a non-profit society. The reporting requirements for charities are more complex than for non-profits, so we need to weigh carefully whether the extra time and effort put in to meeting those reporting requirements would be worth the amount we could potentially receive in donations.

### **3. Facility**

In the first years of our program we received a great deal of support from the Suzuki Charter School in the form of an hourly rent for classroom space which was well below market rates. This allowed us to expand our program offerings and enrolment without adding higher rent costs. When the school moved to a different building, the quality of the teaching space was less good, with poor acoustics in the studio spaces and non-existent soundproofing. Subsequent renovations improved the spaces, but they are still far from ideal. Many of the user groups (other Suzuki teaching organizations in addition to ESFRS) offered to install temporary improvements as a contribution to the community but these offers were discouraged. Then security protocols that were put into effect for all Edmonton schools reduced access to the building. Most recently, the weekend and summer evening rental rate was increased dramatically, which necessitated a reduction in our summer Institute offerings. We have been investigating alternative locations, but the previous years of rent subsidy from the school have made it difficult to suddenly adjust to paying market rates.