

Student Performances: Review, group classes, and the Suzuki approach

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Music programs that implement the Suzuki approach to learning develop confident performers.

How?

- Frequent opportunities to perform
- Perform in a variety of different venues
- Repertoire is selected to review abilities already developed - we never set a goal of having to learn something new for a concert.

The last point is the most important.

Review is a key concept in the Suzuki philosophy.

“Let your child repeatedly practice the pieces he can already play; emphasize the building of ability with familiar pieces. This fosters fine ability. (There is no need to rush ahead. If a child practices the pieces he knows over and over again so as to play them better and better, ability grows, and remarkable progress is made. This is the Suzuki method.)”

Shinichi Suzuki
Where Love is Deep, p. 43

In my experience, the students who do lots of review of past repertoire are the also the ones who learn their new pieces the most quickly. Repertoire review develops a vocabulary of common musical patterns that are recognized quickly and played easily when they appear in a new context.

Students who perform well known, well reviewed pieces are the most confident in a concert situation. They play with accuracy and can concentrate on creating beautiful expression. Students who do not know their performance piece well are worried about whether they will play the correct notes, and become nervous instead of expressive.

In groups, students who know the repertoire well can concentrate on blending pitch and communicating rhythm and phrasing, taking turns leading each other to develop confidence and independence. Students who do not know the repertoire well hold back and wait for someone else to go first.

When you attend a symphony orchestra concert and enjoy the fine performance of a featured soloist, that person has probably already performed the piece many other times, in many other places. If we want our students to be confident presenting themselves for an audience, we need to give them the same opportunities as that soloist has had - lots of review and experience! So we start young, with lots of small low pressure performances in group classes, and build from there.

The yearly Groups & Grads concert demonstrates these important Suzuki principles. The graduating students have not just reached a certain level - they are already past it and well into the next set of repertoire. They return to the older pieces as old friends, and make a recording of their selections which is adjudicated by another teacher other than their usual lesson teacher, and then use that teacher's comments to polish an already very accurate performance. When they come to the concert, they know these pieces so well that they are extremely confident.

The Groups & Grads concert is only one of a series of performances that continue throughout the year, as part of the Edmonton Suzuki Flute & Recorder Society group classes.