

AMBASSADOR

Aber Suzuki Center

University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
College of Fine Arts and Communication
inspire, create, achieve

April 2009

From the Director's Desk

By Dee Martz

During spring break we travelled to Sarasota, Florida to visit my mother who is almost 90 years old. Fortunately she is in such good shape that she lives alone and continues to drive herself around town. However there are real signs of aging and one of those is that she is experiencing a gradual hearing loss. Mom started wearing hearing aids about 6 years ago. At first I could tell that they really helped—that is when she put them in her ears! However, they were somewhat uncomfortable and it was difficult to get used to all the background noise we have in daily life. As time went on, her hearing continued to diminish and a conversation with Mom exhausted my voice, and the high volume on her TV was particularly aggravating to some of my sisters.

In February Mom went to the audiologist and after thorough testing and lots of discussion with all five of her daughters and probably everyone else that she knows, Mom was convinced that it really was worth \$7000 to buy new hearing aids. Mom's hearing appeared to be much better at first and then things seemed to return to the old pattern. This was really disappointing and Mom was ready to give up and retreat back into her fairly solitary life pattern.

During spring break I went with Mom to her first follow-up appointment with the audiologist and the new hearing aids. I observed as the aids, while in Mom's ears, were hooked up to the computer so that adjustments could be made to make these small "computers" get the best possible results. Also, there were some "simple for the audiologist but not so simple for Mom" things to learn to make sure that the technology was working properly. Boy did this remind me of numerous conversations with the IT help desk. In the case of the hearing aids one of several critical issues that came up was how to make sure that the batteries are charged and working properly. It turns out that the batteries slip in very easily even when put in backwards!

Now the big question—why am I telling this story in the Ambassador? It has to do with the big "teaching moment" from the audiologist. Now, Mom can hear better but she has to retrain her brain to process the incoming information. Because it was difficult or perhaps impossible for Mom to understand a great deal of what was being said in her presence or even on TV, she had gotten used to "tuning out" a lot of the time. The audiologist told her that when someone is speaking to her she has to stop, focus just on what is being said and then give herself a few seconds to evaluate what she heard and sort it out. Over time all of this will become much more automatic but right now it takes a lot of effort.

The application to music study is really direct. Imagine a lesson during which the student performs a piece and is very proud of how it sounds. Then the teacher gradually guides the student's focus to some specific area that, with carefully trained listening skills, can be improved to

enhance the performance (e.g. ringing tones, even runs, expressive dynamics, clear pedaling, pure vowel sounds etc.) Gradually the student begins to hear the desired result during the lesson and agrees to continue working on it during the week. The big challenge is to use the same intense focus and listening skills during practice sessions but with the extra effort, and lots of repetition, the new skill can become easy and automatic. However, just as with Mom, things often seem to get better at first and then fall back into old patterns. The "teaching moment" from the audiologist is a lesson we need to remember as musicians. We need to stop, focus and take time to evaluate exactly what we heard. The intense concentration found in critical listening is an essential part of every successful practice session.



Congratulations, Mary Hofer!

Congratulations to Mary Hofer – the first Voice Teacher Trainer approved by the Suzuki Association of the Americas.

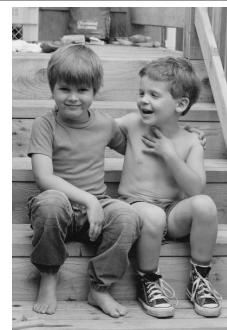
Following the Suzuki Association of the Americas process for identifying and approving Teacher Trainers Mary Hofer submitted all the materials required for evaluation in early January. I am pleased to announce that she was notified on March 12 that all aspects of her application were approved unanimously by those assigned to evaluate her materials. It should be noted that applicants only need to be approved by 2 out of 3 of those who evaluate each section, so Mary's received an exceptionally strong validation of her work.



BRING A FRIEND – SHARE THE EXPERIENCE!!

Aber Suzuki Center Festival Concert
April 26, 2:00 p.m.
Ben Franklin Jr. High Auditorium
Reception to follow

(free and open to the public)



The Gift of Giving: Why Performing and Attending Performances Matter

By Thomas Yang

A number of weeks ago, a friend of our family's came to one of the solo recitals to hear our older daughter play. As she looked at the program she was happy to find out that the children of other families she knew were also playing. Her attendance at this program was an act of friendship, expressing a conviction that performing is an important event that requires support. In a performance, with all the attention given to those who are playing, it is easy to forget that it is the audience that completes the circuit. Without attentive, loving listening, there is no real performance. Like two ballroom dancers forming a pair, the performer and the listener are both required for the event. Participating in a live performance, either as a listener or a performer is a wonderful privilege that everyone should experience while studying music. The act of participating in a live performance breathes joy and life into any musician.

As a young piano student, I did not enjoy participating in piano recitals. It has been something of a surprise to me that so many of my students respond positively to suggestions that they play on a program or play for a competition. Most students who participate in WMTA and WSMA auditions seem to want to do it every year. The adult students who by and large will say that they only want to learn to play an instrument for their own enjoyment have made attendance at the adult recital a priority. The fact is most of my students seem to think or act as if they think that performing is an important thing to do. Further, it seems that students who are serious musicians find it important to attend their friends' recitals. There seems to be a sense of collegiality, a sense of belonging by sharing in the experience of performing. C. S. Lewis wrote:

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment;....It is frustrating to have discovered a new author and not to be able to tell anyone how good he is; to come suddenly, at the turn of the road, upon some mountain valley of unexpected grandeur and then to have to keep silent because the people with you care for it no more than for a tin can in the ditch; to hear a good joke and find no one to share it with (the perfect hearer died a year ago). (95)

In the same way, the preparation our students undergo to learn to turn a beautiful phrase, to play with expression and security, requires an audience with which he can share this accomplishment. A musical performance is a natural way to cap off a musical achievement.

The film *Babette's Feast* offers some insights into the relationship between artist and audience. The story centers around two sisters who are the daughters of a leader of a severe religious sect. The sisters renounce everything and devote themselves to the service of others. One sister is courted by a soldier, but does nothing to encourage him until he finally gives up. The other sister has a beautiful singing voice, is discovered by a well known opera singer who offers her voice lessons, but gives up lessons because of the feelings she experiences in singing a role of a woman being pursued by the title character of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. The two sisters never marry and attempt to sustain their father's religious vision after he dies. Babette, the title character, arrives at their doorstep, fleeing from political turmoil in France. The sisters take Babette in to be a cook and a servant. What they don't know is that Babette was the head chef at a very excellent restaurant in Paris. One day Babette receives a message telling her that she has won ten thousand francs in the lottery. She offers to prepare a banquet for the remaining members in commemoration of the 100th birthday of the sisters' father. When the sisters see the sumptuous ingredients that Babette orders, they have second thoughts about having accepted her offer. They tell the rest of the group about their misgivings and it is decided that they would partake of the feast but not say a word about the food. They would not show any pleasure in the food. In fact, having subsisted on very primitive fare, they don't even have a clue as to

how to eat the delicacies Babette prepared for them and have to follow the lead of a general (the soldier who had courted one of the sisters) who came to the dinner with his aunt. Babette serves the dinner and in spite of the decision to not comment on the food, the food is enjoyed by all and the dinner has a very positive transformational effect on those eating it. Fond reminiscences are made. Broken relationships and hard feelings are healed during the dinner. After everyone has left, the sisters congratulate Babette on the dinner. Babette reveals her identity as the head chef of the restaurant in Paris. The sisters ask if she will be returning to Paris. Babette then tells them that she spent all the money on the dinner and therefore has no money in which she could effect a return. One of the sisters expresses regret that Babette spent all her money on them. Babette tells them that she too was a beneficiary of having given them this feast. She goes on to say that "An artist is never poor." She quotes the opera singer who had given one of the sisters singing lessons years ago: "Throughout the world sounds one long cry from the heart of the artist. Give me a chance to do my very best." (Quotations in this synopsis are from the subtitles in the film.)

Art is meant to be received. For the Suzuki parent and student this implies that our study of music involves other people. We prepare our children not only to be performers but to be an educated audience. Though the diners (with the exception of the general) for whom Babette prepared this banquet were unwilling and unprepared to enjoy the artistry involved in this meal, they were indispensable. Without them, all of Babette's artistry and expense would have been in vain.

Art can have a transforming effect on both the performer and the listener. Those partaking of the meal were transformed by it. Similarly, playing a piece before a sympathetic audience can build a bond between a performer and a listener. As parents and fellow students, we can be a part of something that is outside of us and join a fellowship of student musicians and parents who take joy in one another's accomplishments.

The work of an artist is one of both grace and prodigality. Babette poured all her financial resources and all her talent into preparing this meal. It was an act of love that summoned all her powers of judgment, cooking skill and sensitivity. It was an act of generosity made to a group of people who from all appearances seemed incapable of enjoying her work. Practically speaking, it did not seem to make sense. The time, effort and resources committed by the Suzuki parent and student as they prepare for performance may also seem to make no sense, but similar acts of prodigality can be seen in many different places in life. We plan dinners and events where everything has to be just right. We look for the right words when we want to express affection or appreciation or even apology to a friend. We look for just the right gift for someone we love. These are not acts of efficiency but rather the essence of humans trying to reach out to one another.

Receiving can be an act of giving. Enjoying a French meal prepared by a world-class chef is an easy gift to receive. A child's gift may not be as easy, because it may interrupt the flow of our time and our space. My older daughter loves to draw and write. She will often present one of her efforts to her mom and me. Our house is in fact full of her art-work, which causes us some anguish in deciding what to keep. Her presentations which can be frequent can also be disruptive – yet they are very welcome. All parents will know what I'm talking about. Children need to give and have their gifts received with joy and pleasure. It acknowledges the effort – it makes them realize that their work can make life richer for someone else. Our children's gifts to us need to be lovingly received – it may be one of the most valuable gifts that we give them.

All of us want to give our children this gift – it catches my attention when some, such as the family friend I referred to at the beginning of this piece offer this gift of time and attention to the children of someone else. All of us who are part of the Aber Suzuki Center have been invited to take part in a feast every month in Marathons and recitals. The simple act of receiving the fruit of a child's work is almost certainly an act of love that will enrich the child because like Babette, that child has been given a platform to

share her efforts with someone else. It may also be one of the greatest gifts we allow ourselves, for by taking time to receive a gift from a child, we are taking time to be loved by a child.

Works Cited

Babette's Feast. Dir. Gabriel Axel. Based on "Babette's Feast" from Anecdotes of Destiny and Ehrengard by Isak Dinesen. Perf. Gita Norby, Stephane Audran, Bodil Kjer, 1987.
Lewis, C.S. Reflections on the Psalms. San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1986.



Voila Viola
By Dee Martz

Quite a few years ago, a former student and I spent quite a bit of time emailing "pithy practice tips" back and forth. A short while later the same thing happened on the Yahoo viola list. I saved a bunch of these exchanges in a folder on my computer and for some reason I found myself poking around in that folder this week. The first of these short comments is mine and the second one came from Scot Buzz, a former student who is now a professional musician.

This year I have adopted a mantra for all practice situations. "Beware! You learn what you practice." Somehow it calls me back to the basics of good skill building (technical and musical). I don't know if you are like me but I have to be especially diligent when I feel the pressure of having to learn something quickly. In my case fast practice rarely yields clean, beautiful playing. Even though I know that focused, accurate practicing gives me more reliable results, I have to guard against hurrying to learn. This mantra helps settle me into a more fruitful practice frame. (DM)

I've been able to solve a million and one problems of tone production, especially in raspy, fuzzy détaché on the lower strings, by just standing in front of the mirror and making sure the bow is parallel to the bridge and the hair is flat on the string. This sounds really fundamental, but it's one of those Hints from Heloise that I keep rediscovering. (SB)



ASC Parent Education Sessions

All Aber Suzuki Center parents are encouraged to attend the Parent Education Sessions which are offered to you free of charge! Join the April session, "**Fostering Independent Learning**", on Tuesday, April 14, at 7:30 pm in NFAC Room 144.

Future sessions are as follows:

May 12: "In the Good Old Summertime: Survival of Those Lazy Days of Summer"

We look forward to seeing you there!!!



Student News

Jonathan Cochrane entertained residents and family of the Bethany Pines assisted living center in Waupaca for their Valentine's Day Dinner on February 14th. On Sunday, March 15, the Wild Rose Kiwanis sponsored a concert by the Villard Cello Choir in combination with the Wild Rose High

School Music Department. Jonathan played three violin solos on the program.

WSMA Solo and Ensemble District Participants: **Emily Spaid, Alan Kiepert, Petrea Schedgick, Stacey Rolak, Bryce Marion, Jonathan Cochrane**.

Special congratulations to **Petrea Schedgick, Stacey Rolak and Bryce Marion** for making the "Wall of Fame", a distinction given for an outstanding performance.

Non-competitive Solo and Ensemble Participants: **Alyssa Eiden, Craig Felt, Rachel Ley, Maleah Zinda**

The following students participated in the UWSP Open House on Sunday, March 29th: **Jake Kubisiak, Michael Josephson, Laura Josephson, Annie Yao, Rachel Reichert, Sarah Harmon, Joanna Sakamaki, Cal Irons, Alyssa Schroekenthaler, Hope Mahon, Havilah Vang, Katherine Young, Eleanor Mutschlechner, Marco Kurzynski, Elijah Vang, Ada Sell, Gerald Sakamaki, Peter O'Reilly, Emily Clay, and Emily Karbowski**.



Upcoming Events

Saturday, April 4, 2009

Marathon (Piano Only), 9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Sunday, April 5, 2009

Solo Recitals, 2:00 and 3:30 pm, NFAC Michelsen Hall

Tuesday, April 14

Parent Education Session
"Fostering Independent Learning"
NFAC 144, 7:30 pm

Saturday, April 25, 2009

Hillary Anderson Senior Recital (Voice)
1:30 pm, NFAC Michelsen Hall

Sunday, April 26, 2009

Aber Suzuki Center Festival Concert
2:00 pm, Ben Franklin Junior High School Auditorium

Saturday, May 9, 2009

Solo & Ensemble Concert
2:00 and 3:30 pm, NFAC Michelsen Hall

Saturday, May 9, 2009

CSCO Concert
7:30 pm, NFAC Michelsen Hall

Sunday, May 10, 2009

Piano Festival Concert
2:00 and 3:30 pm, NFAC Michelsen Hall

Tuesday, May 12

Parent Education Session
"In the Good Old Summertime: Survival of Those Lazy Days of Summer"
NFAC 144, 7:30 pm



MAP TO BEN FRANKLIN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL
2000 POLK STREET
STEVENS POINT

Aber Suzuki Center Festival Concert

Sunday, April 26, 2009

2:00 pm

Ben Franklin Junior High School Auditorium

