
The Life-Changing Benefits of Suzuki Membership! by Kylie Mahony



Parents, you may remember when your child first commenced their music lessons, one of the first things your teacher requested was for you to join the Suzuki Association. I'm sure at the time you probably wondered why you should do that! After all, you are enrolling your child in individual private lessons with a carefully selected teacher. Is there any point in joining some Association? Amongst all the other extra expenses associated with commencing music lessons, it may seem a little pointless to take out membership as well!

Please come with me - I would like to take you on a journey back many years in time. It's summer time and in a large, hot and crowded room a little girl of about age four or five is attending one of her first Suzuki Association group lessons. She is very shy and isn't even sure she wants to be there - there are so many people! More than a little scared, and half inclined to run crying back to her mother, she sits on the floor with her tiny violin, with what seems like about a hundred other strange children, wondering what's supposed to happen next. The teacher asks the older students to stand. They divide up into two groups and commence to make magic happen before the little girl's very eyes. She is seeing and hearing Bach's Concerto for Two Violins played for the very first time. She is instantly captivated! "WOW!" she thinks "How amazing! I want to be able to do that! When can I learn to play that piece?"

A couple of years later, the same little girl is in Adelaide Town Hall for the first time. She's dressed in her Suzuki uniform - a white shirt and a navy blue skirt. She's heard that Dr. Suzuki's Japanese students have arrived in Adelaide for a concert. Years later she will remember how awestruck she was by the Japanese children's beautiful playing. How exciting and motivating to play in the group items at the end of the concert, side-by-side with little children from another, very different part of the world!



Fast-forward again this time many years later and the little girl is now 15 years old. It's January, summer holiday time and Adelaide is hosting an International Suzuki Conference - the biggest gathering of Suzuki people from all over the world. For months, her family and other devoted Suzuki families have worked tirelessly - fundraising, booking venues, promoting and organising this huge event for thousands of Australian and International members of the worldwide Suzuki family.

On the night of the spectacular Ensemble Concert she is again in the Town Hall, this time sitting right in the very back row, all by herself. She's performed already with the South Australian kids and now it's time to watch Yasuki Nakamura's students from Sydney perform as a group. They file onstage, the girls in their pretty white dresses, the boys very debonair in their concert uniforms. There are about ten or so kids, most of them younger than her by several years. Mr. Nakamura's teenage daughter Hikare sits down at the piano as the other kids raise their violins. They perform - in perfect unison - the 3rd movement of Sibelius's Violin Concerto. This is one of the most incredibly difficult pieces ever written for violin. They play it with electrifying ease, from memory, flying through the piece as if it were easier than Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star! For the young girl in the back row, this moment is literally life changing. For the very first time a unique thought occurs to her: "I don't know if I will ever teach the violin in my lifetime - but if I do - I want to be THAT kind of teacher, with students who play like THAT!"



These snapshots are - you guessed it - from some of my most precious memories of growing up as a Suzuki student. As a very young student, sitting down and hearing and seeing children more advanced than me playing pieces I knew I would soon learn was always a huge motivation. I would be strongly possessed of a feeling of "I want to do that too!" And because I stayed with the Suzuki Method right through high school, I got to experience Suzuki from a more mature perspective. I began to understand how amazing and how precious it was to be part of this method, how it was a special and different way to learn music. I was glad and proud to be growing up with Dr. Suzuki's philosophy. I would never have wanted to become a Suzuki teacher myself if I hadn't had a chance to learn that in my teen years.

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And what - you may be asking - has any of this to do with joining your local Suzuki Association? I guess I wanted to share with you the perspective of someone who grew up with the Method from childhood. I'd like to invite you to see how being a member of the Association will be important from your child's point of view, not only from your own. If you ask me to remember what it was like to practice every day with my Dad from age 4, I can hardly remember! Only a few times can I remember individual practice sessions and they were the ones where I practiced with tears in my eyes 'cause I really didn't want to! (Sorry Dad! I love you!! I'm so glad you made me practice even when I didn't want to haha!)



When I became a Suzuki teacher, my understanding of the value and importance of being part of a worldwide music community became even deeper. I remember reading how Dr. Suzuki was moved to tears the first time American and Japanese Suzuki children performed onstage together in the 1960's. "Twenty years ago", Suzuki said "their fathers met each other to make war. Today, their children meet to make music together in peace".

Dr. Suzuki really did believe that if all children in the world developed their character and sensitivity through making beautiful music, perhaps music really could save humanity. I feel deep in my heart it really is that amazing and special to be part of an international music community devoted to this idealistic hope for our world. No other music method I can think of has this kind of extended family of like-minded people spread across every part of the planet.

I really hope to encourage all Suzuki families to feel they are part of something special. For sure, you will not get this precious experience for your child from any other way of learning music! Trust me – your child will have some of their most precious and meaningful lifelong memories attached to the various concerts, group lessons, graduations and events you take them to during their Suzuki experience. Participating in the community will inspire and motivate both of you to keep working hard, moving forward and maximizing the child's natural ability.

If you ask me to remember lessons with my teacher there are very few that come to mind. So what do I remember about growing up as a Suzuki student? Always, it is the group lessons, the concerts, the workshops, being with the other children, having fun backstage, running around and playing together at break time. Being a part of the Association meant I wasn't a lonely child going from lesson to practice to lesson to practice, endlessly. Think how un-motivating and pointless that would feel to a child! Instead, I knew lots of other children who played music. I had lots of exciting events to look forward to and to practice for. I took great pride in graduating through the various levels. And many times, my family travelled interstate to attend Association workshops in other states so I gradually got to know the Melbourne Suzuki kids, the Sydney kids, the Perth kids, so years later when we were all at National Music Camp and in the Australian Youth Orchestra together, touring the world we had known each other since childhood and came together as old friends.



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Here are some the benefits that I can think of right now that you gain from becoming a Suzuki member:

- You will belong to a worldwide Suzuki family. You can travel anywhere in the world - and because all Suzuki students learn the same repertoire - there is no language barrier. All Suzuki children can play and enjoy music together! Your membership fee contributes to the ISA – the International Suzuki Association.
- You will have the privilege of studying from a specialist, highly-trained teacher. Few other music methods or systems actually train their teachers much at all. By contrast, Suzuki teachers have to undergo years of rigorous and on-going training to become qualified. Your membership fee contributes to teacher education and training
- You will have access to all Suzuki group lessons, workshops and concerts. These are the fun and motivating events that will re-inspire you and your child to keep practicing and working towards the next goal!
- You will have access to the Suzuki Graduation system. The Graduation levels for each instrument take your child from a beginner to playing top-level, professional level repertoire. The Graduation system motivates your child to progress and also gives meaningful acknowledgement of their progress.
- By going through the Graduation levels, your child will be part of an internationally recognized system of accomplishment. If you go anywhere in the world

and tell someone you have just done an AMEB Grade 8 exam most people would say "Sorry? What is AMEB?". But if instead you say "I just graduated Suzuki Violin Book 10" every person who hears that will know that is a very high level of accomplishment.

- Part of your membership includes access to our quarterly newsletter and to our website so that you can stay on top of upcoming events. The newsletter is something we are very proud of! It is filled with useful and interesting music learning tips; reflections; inspirational articles and photographs and information about music opportunities – both Suzuki and from the wider music community. The newsletter and website will help you feel connected to and part of the Suzuki SA family.
- By being part of the Suzuki membership, you will have a presence and a voice. If you have suggestions or ideas about how to help us optimize your child's Suzuki experience you will find your input very welcome. Our sole purpose is to be a positive influence in your family's life for as long as your child is a Suzuki student.

Please remember (as you gladly pay your membership this year!), that Suzuki SA is run by a small team of dedicated volunteer teachers and parents and just one very busy administrator. We do everything we can to put on fun and inspiring events for all Suzuki SA families to enjoy. We are a not-for-profit organization and are very careful to keep things as cost effective as possible. If you don't have time to actually volunteer the very best way to support your own teacher and help keep Suzuki SA strong and healthy is to pay your membership fee. We are extremely grateful for this support from you. Thank you!

