

Suzuki Stories from the Past: Mark Bjork (Part 1)



This is the first in a series of articles that highlight stories from the MacPhail Suzuki program's rich history. This article features Mark Bjork, the founder of the MacPhail Suzuki Program. A retired professor of violin and pedagogy from the University of Minnesota School of Music he returned to the MacPhail Suzuki violin faculty in 2016. We interviewed Mr. Bjork recently to learn our program's origin story from his perspective.

Mark Bjork is an SAA-registered Teacher Trainer and is recognized internationally as a leader in the field of Suzuki Talent Education. A graduate of Indiana University, he studied violin under the renowned pedagogue Josef Gingold. In 1967, he started one of the first Suzuki programs in the United States at MacPhail.

Mark Bjork did not set out to start a Suzuki program. He was a violinist, and never imagined a career in teaching for himself. After moving to the Twin Cities in the 1960s, Mr. Bjork did some guest teaching at the University of Minnesota and discovered what would become his life's passion.

Mr. Bjork's first real introduction to Suzuki Talent Education occurred when he attended a workshop with Shinichi Suzuki and his group of touring violin students. He shares his reflections about this experience in a recent podcast for the Suzuki Association of the Americas. (Full podcast available at Suzukiassociation.org).

"There was an opportunity to go see and hear the tour group. I was curious about this, because it was something new, and people were talking about it. A group of us got up at three o'clock in the morning and drove to Macomb, Illinois. It was in fall of '66. Suzuki would do a workshop demonstration in the afternoon, followed by a concert in the evening. The workshop was absolutely fascinating because he was talking about very, very sophisticated points of violin playing. And then he had some of his students demonstrate these points. And it was quite obvious that there was something very special going on. That evening was the concert, which completely expanded my viewpoint of what could be done with children. This was a group of eight children, and as we were told, there were hundreds more [like them] in Japan. So I felt that I had to find out as much as I could about how this was done. And that's how it all started."

After returning from the workshop, Mr. Bjork noticed that there was a growing interest in the Suzuki method at the University of Minnesota. In the fall of 1967, Mr. Bjork was hired jointly by MacPhail and the University of Minnesota to teach six to seven violin students. He put an ad in the newspaper announcing that he would be offering lessons to young children based on the concepts of Suzuki education. In October 1967, the Star Tribune featured an article about the Suzuki method, including a picture of a young MacPhail violin Suzuki student with his mother. The calls poured in, and Mr. Bjork's studio grew.

In the early days, the Suzuki program depended heavily on the support of parents and family members. The first group of parents were highly committed to this new educational phenomenon. At the time, parents were just starting to become involved in music education. They no longer simply paid the bill and dropped the kids off.

Due to the humble beginnings of the program, there was no administrative staff. Mr. Bjork's wife, Nancy Bjork, a professional string bass musician, answered inquiries and managed the waitlist with no compensation. The small program of families developed a strong camaraderie, and they were extremely supportive of each other and of the students. The foundations of a Suzuki community began.

Read Part 2 in the next Gavotte.

Halloween Play-In Photos from Friday, October 27 and Saturday, October 28!
Thank You Tracy Dunne and Kim Kozak for taking photos!



Grace Anderson is a Suzuki Piano Student of Cindy Malmin. Check out Grace in her leading role below!



stagestheatreco Grace Annabella Anderson plays Belle in Disney's Beauty and the Beast, Jr. (Nov 17 - Dec 28, 2017). Grace is grateful to be making her STC debut! Grace is a sophomore at @minnehahaacademy and a student at @baaofnyc Broadway Artists Alliance in NYC. She sings with Partners in Praise Choir, studies Suzuki piano and guitar at @macphailmusic , and also writes and performs her own original songs. <http://ow.ly/Rh7030g8WGs> #stcBeauty #DisneysBeautyandtheBeastJr

Upcoming Events

Friday, November 10

Suzuki Department Recital, 6 pm, Antonello Hall

Friday, November 17

Suzuki Department Recital, 6 pm, Antonello Hall

Saturday, November 18

Andrea French Suzuki Cello and Violin Studio Recital, Antonello Hall

Sunday, November 19

Cindy Malmin Suzuki Piano Recital, Antonello Hall, 2:45 pm and 4:15 pm

Kathy Wood Suzuki Violin Recital, 1:00 pm, Kenwood Senior Living Center

Friday, December 1

CONGRATULATIONS!



Alex

and Mitch Hinrichs graduations from Suzuki Piano Book 2A!

Maheeya Bhattacharya graduation from Suzuki Piano Book 2!

Gabriella Geer, Suzuki Piano Student of Annette Lee, performed "In the Spirit" at the All School Recital. Pictured above with the composer of the piece, Christopher Norton!

Paloma Petersen practiced 400 days in a row!



<http://www.macphail.org/suzuki-50th-anniversary/>