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Violin Study Methods For Beginning Violinists

By Leah Megiel

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What is the best study method for your student violinist?

This article will provide you with information regarding the two most popular methods of violin study—the Suzuki study method and the traditional study method. I will share my experience, as a parent — not as a music teacher. My hope is that you will find this information valuable in helping you determine which method of study — Suzuki or traditional— would best fit your needs.

The following is a brief outline of both study methods.

Suzuki violin method overview:

- Suzuki is very much a parental "hands-on" method of violin study. Parents must attend individual lessons so they will be able to help their child with practicing at home. This provides an invaluable tool for the child as well as a great chance for interaction in a fun and exciting journey for parent and child. The advantage of parental involvement cannot be emphasized enough.
- Formal education may start as early as two or three. It is also effective for students of any age.
- Emphasis is in watching and listening. Music is memorized by ear through repeatedly play recordings in the home. Listening to the recordings helps the student to internalize the details of the music such as dynamics, pitch and tone.
- Formal reading of music is not taught until basic skills have been mastered technically.
- In addition to individual lessons, group lessons are required with Suzuki. The purpose of working in a group is to give younger students the opportunity to observe others who are playing at a higher level. This is not a competitive arena and as a parent, you should be observing the group class. This is meant to be a positive and encouraging atmosphere.

Traditional violin method overview:

- Parental involvement usually not encouraged.
- Formal education usually begins between the ages of six and 10. Many traditional violin teachers are unwilling to take on a student younger than six.

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- Beginning students do not listen to recordings of the pieces before they start to learn them. This is to develop sight reading skills.
- Individual lessons are all that is required. There are no group lessons and little to no interaction with peers.

Our daughter's teacher is primarily an advocate of the Suzuki method. We have enjoyed the Suzuki method for the following reasons:

1. Parental involvement — we strongly believe this has been a key element in our daughter's success and also her enjoyment of the violin. We are in a position where I am able to commit to the practice times so this has worked out well for us.

2. Group lessons — this has been an encouragement and inspiration for our daughter. Because of group lessons, she has been able to play in trios at the last two Christmas concerts. The older children

are kind and the atmosphere is warm and inviting.

3. Most importantly is the teacher. We have a wonderful teacher who is willing and able to work with our daughter on every level. This past year, the teacher felt our daughter needed to develop her sight reading skills to prepare for the next level of Suzuki. So, we took a break from Suzuki and did traditional for several months. You have got to find a teacher who knows when to challenge your child and also when to step back. I cannot stress this enough, you have to have a good teacher.

In closing, you are strongly encouraged to do whatever it takes to make this a fun, enjoyable experience for your child. If you start with one teacher and find they are not meeting the needs of your child, then don't wait too long to switch. After all, a poor experience at a young age can turn a child off to music lessons for a long time, possibly forever.

Leah is a Mom and proud creator of www.student-violins.com, a site aimed at helping and encouraging parents of violin students.

The Haunting Of The Violin

By Rudolph Jones

The sad and haunting melodies of a violinist are never forgotten. They remain with you always coming back again and again. The true charm of music lies in how it can affect you and your emotions. I believe that violin has the power of captivation. It is not only sad but uplifting also. The true instrument of love and emotion, the violin truly is a wonder among all the musical instruments.

A good violin is made up of a spruce top, maple ribs and back. Two end blocks, bridge, sound post and 4 strings are other key requirements for a violin. Various other fittings can be attached and an optional chin rest.

What distinguishes a violin body is its "hourglass" shape and the arching of its top and back. The hourglass shape comprises an upper bout, a lower bout, and two concave C-bouts at the "waist," providing clearance for the bow.

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The voice of the violin is solely dependent on its wood and varnish. It is also some what controlled by the graduation and thickness that of the body. As the varnish and wood improve by age, old violins are continuously sort after in the market today.

Earlier, violin strings were made of sheep gut stretched. Today however, they are made up of solid steel or stranded steel. When and how to change strings is often advised by the teacher depending how hard you play. Violinists often carry spare supply of strings in case any one string does not play true.

Violin comes in different sizes. Smaller ones are usually preferred for children learning the instrument at the beginning.

Teachers determine what size is best. A true large size violin can be of 14 inches long.

How are they tuned? Tuning is a very important issue for many instruments. The violin can be tuned by turning the pegs or fine tuners on the tail piece. These fine tuners allow for slight adjustments to the tensions of the strings.

So, how is it played? Tuning and everything is fine but how do you produce that melody? A violin is usually played using a bow consisting of a stick with a ribbon of horsehair strung between the tip and frog (or nut, or heel) at opposite ends. A typical violin bow may be 29 inches. Usually, the hair of a violin bow is got from the tail of a mail horse. Though some cheaper violins have this made up of plastics or synthetics. There is also a leather grip at one end with winding to protect the stick and provide thumb rest for the player. The winding can be made up of whale bone but today it is manufactured of fiber glass.

The violin is an instrument you can never forget. The tunes are replayed in your memory even after the instrument has stopped. It is as if the instrument can talk and has spoken words of wisdom. If there is any instrument that can reproduce the words of the heart, it is the violin.

Rudolph Jones is the editor of *Orchestral Supply*. A Meeting place for music enthusiasts, offering

orchestral resources, supplie and a shopping guide.



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