

---

# CONTENTS

HARUKO KATAOKA (translated by KYOKO SELDEN)

PREFACE	7
ON PIANO TECHNIQUE: INTRODUCTION	9
THE BEGINNING IS CRUCIAL	11
STUDY BASIC QUESTIONS	13
LET SOUND BE YOUR GUIDE IN LEARNING TO PLAY THE PIANO	14
HOW TO CREATE GOOD TONE	16
Sit on the Piano Chair with a Good Posture	16
How to Relax	16
Bodily Balance	18
The Height of the Chair	19
How to Use the Thumb	20
How to Use the Little Finger	21
How to Use the Wrist	22
How to Use the Arms	23
How to Produce Sound	24
HOW TO PLAY LEGATO	26
HOW TO PLAY STACCATO	28
HOW TO PLAY CHORDS	29
HOW TO HANDLE DYNAMICS	30
WATCH THE MUSIC CAREFULLY	32
NATURAL SOUND, LIGHT SOUND	34
WHAT IS IMPORTANT IS NATURALNESS AND FREEDOM	35
CONCLUSION	36

ABOUT SUZUKI is a series of publications dealing with the philosophy of early childhood education developed by Shinichi Suzuki. Beginning with the successful “mother tongue” approach to the teaching of violin and musicianship to very young children, his methodology has been expanded to include cello, viola, string ensemble, piano and flute. The Suzuki emphasis on teaching the whole child in the way most natural to each child has gained worldwide acceptance. Suzuki teachers can be found in every corner of the globe, and educators have become increasingly interested in comparing the Suzuki approach to other pioneering trends in childhood education. “About Suzuki” publications make the exciting and thought-provoking concepts of this international forum equally accessible to educators, parents, students, and the general reader.

HARUKO KATAOKA is one of the world’s leading authorities on the Suzuki Piano School. Through her teaching and her personal trips to the United States and Canada, she has spread the message of Shinichi Suzuki that children can learn to play more naturally and with better tone. Born in 1927 in Tokyo, Kataoka began her study of the piano at age 6, studying with Yoshimune Hirata until she was 16. After World War II, she continued her studies with Haruko Fujita. In 1955, she was first introduced to The Suzuki Method. She travelled to Matsumoto in 1956 to study with Dr. Suzuki, and was deeply impressed with the results he was achieving in teaching children to play the violin. Dr. Suzuki’s method not only affected her teaching, but also her own playing of the piano. Today, Haruko Kataoka participates in conferences, workshops, and summer institutes throughout the world on the Suzuki Piano School.

---

# HARUKO KATAOKA

- 1927 Born in Tokyo.
- Started piano at six.
- Studied with Yoshimune Hirata from ages 8 to 16.
- Studied with Haruko Fujita starting in 1945.
- 1956 Moved from Tokyo to Matsumoto; studied the Suzuki Method with Shin'ichi Suzuki.
- 1973 Participated in workshops in the United States for the first time. Since then has taught Suzuki piano every year in the United States, Canada, England, Australia, etc.

**I**f you want your child to learn piano, the best way is to study it by the Suzuki method.

The basic idea of the Suzuki method is to help children learn music in the same way as people learn the mother tongue.

A newborn baby spontaneously starts to hear words spoken by people around him, picks up language little by little, and comes to be able to speak fluently before anybody realizes it. In the same way, by the Suzuki method, the child is surrounded by music so that he spontaneously picks it up through his senses.

For a few dozen years, both in Japan and the United States, this approach has actually been enthusiastically practiced, and its success has been recognized in many areas.

Traditionally, the teacher taught children to play the piano while looking at the music from the start. This created many difficulties, and tended to make children hate music. However, as in language, music which enters through the ear spontaneously penetrates into children's bodies and hearts, helping them grow as people who heartily enjoy music.

This is something wonderful. It is possible that music lovers will fill the earth. We would certainly be able then to enjoy a world without war or atomic bombs.

It has become clear to us that a child who begins music study by the Suzuki method learns it with ease as he does the mother tongue. However, the actual piano technique requires examination. In the past, through flawed learning approaches, most people formed bad habits as a result of neglect of fundamental study of piano technique. Many fail to play as they wish.

This situation is a negative influence on the child beginner.

Piano technique should be studied more thoroughly so that every beginner is able to learn to play with greater ease.

---

## ON PIANO TECHNIQUE: INTRODUCTION

**P**iano technique means how one should play the piano in order to be able to play with greatest ease and skill.

I am sure that there have been countless books on piano technique. They must all be of fine content and of great significance. Given these books, have all the many people who started learning piano throughout the world come to be able to play skillfully, if not necessarily as professional pianists? The answer, I think, is “no.”

Most people either quit in the middle or acquire only clumsy skills unsatisfactory to themselves despite the fact that they have applied themselves diligently.

So, let’s think about how best to use the body in order to play the piano. What do we wish to play on the piano? Wonderful music, as I am sure you will agree.

Putting aside this wonderful thing called music, however, finger movement is a question of the body. Therefore, we need to think carefully about problems which precede making music.

In the past this question has been overlooked, I think, hidden behind the beautiful name of music.

Let’s compare the body movements required for piano playing to walking. All human beings learn to walk after birth. Thousands of millions of people on the globe walk unerringly. Did God determine that human beings should be able to balance themselves standing up and walk on two legs? I had long thought it simply natural.

Why does everyone learn to walk skillfully? It is because everyone grows while daily watching people walking. The baby learns to stand by around ten months of age, and gradually begins to walk. Every baby spontaneously learns a natural, economic way of walking.

---

## HOW TO PLAY LEGATO

**W**hen playing the piano, the most difficult and at once the most important is beautiful legato. Although many think they understand the legato technique, I have a feeling that few can play perfect legato.

For legato, all we need is to do with the fingers on the keyboard what we do with our legs when we walk normally.

Human beings are not naturally stiff and do not find it hard to move. Normal people shift their body weight from one leg to the other with true dexterity, and walk lightly while smoothly balancing the body.

It is the same with the fingers. All we need to do is to fix the wrist in place, put the hand over the keyboard, put the weight of the palm and arm on the five fingers as we put our body weight on the right or the left leg when walking, and use the fingers deftly while shifting the weight from finger to finger as though they were walking.

Here is a method of practice which is easy to understand:

In each of the above sets you are to play two adjacent keys on the keyboard using two fingers as though walking on two legs.

Start at the edge of the keys, and as you take a step, two steps, three steps, walk very naturally in toward the further ends of the keys.

This is the easiest way to understand legato.

The weight of the hand must always be on the finger in use.

What will happen when fingers are stiff or when they rush? The tone produced solely by fingers or the tone produced by a mere touch of the fingers due to rushing