

**Playing Along:
Teaching with Two Pianos
Resonant Instruments for “Living Tone”
“Tone has a Living Soul”**

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I play, you play. Teacher plays, student imitates. Shin'ichi Suzuki taught this way. Ravi Shankar taught George Harrison this way. Folk music is naturally transmitted like this. Suzuki teaching is this way. The teacher has an instrument in hand; the student has an instrument in hand. The music is the actual teacher. The sound is the teacher. The greatest artists are our teachers when we listen to them in person and on recordings.

The human teacher relates to the instrument with body and mind. The student sees and hears the relationships. The student can play along with the teacher while watching and listening to the teacher. Both people maintain their poise of body and mind, at one with the instrument and at one with each other, at one with the music. They sit or stand near each other.

String and wind players can change their positions easily. Pianists have to sit in one spot; they choose the best way for student and teacher to see each other's hands without twisting or tensing (as little as possible). This is with the keyboards side by side, like one long 176-key keyboard. The players can actually play and see the other player's hands, while cultivating their peripheral vision, and their listening.

Haruko Kataoka, co-founder and co-developer of the Suzuki Piano Method, in lessons we observed in 1976 at Dr. Suzuki's Talent Education (Ability Development) Institute in Matsumoto, Japan, would play along with a Book One student for more than half of the lesson time. They'd play many pieces together. Consciously and unconsciously, the student absorbs many aspects of the music directly from the sounds and body/instrument relationship of the teacher's playing.

Piano teachers need to teach with two excellent instruments side by side.

Both players are at good grand pianos. The tone quality and musicality of the teacher's sound is what the student strives for. The student needs an instrument capable of producing truly musical sounds, with ringing resonant tone, including ability to sound very quiet ringing sound, also many increasing levels of volume. Ten to twenty different loudness possibilities on each note will give a musical range of expression, like many different colors give more range of expression than just three or five (like some upright pianos with only three).

The lesson pianos and the home piano both need to be of the highest quality, truly musical instruments.

The home instrument needs to attract the student by its beautifully resonant sound and feel. It needs to be entrancing. Then the student will be inspired to practice. The imagination will be lit up, the heart warmed. The quality of sound of one note, with the key still depressed and the damper off, will ring and resonate and change through time, with different overtones coming into prominence as we keep listening. This resonance is what our feelings ride along on; it has life which merges into our life. Dr. Suzuki's saying "Tone has a living soul" has meaning for all musicians, for pianists too. String and wind players can alter the tone through its duration, and make it "live". But after pianists control the initial attack, they have less control over the following sound quality. We pianists need instruments that HAVE duration and resonance. A piano whose tone dies soon has little life. We need to ride on long resonance to shape our musical living life. We need to give children instruments with living tone.

A dull instrument may be boring and uninviting. Children won't be inspired to practice when it means listening to sounds which are not beautiful. Practice is a discipline which involves much time and effort. A fascinating sounding, inviting instrument is central to motivation; it creates enthusiasm for practice.

The FEEL of the playing of the keyboard, the action, needs to be right also. Playing needs to feel good. It needs to feel wonderful, not too stiff, not too loose either. The proper keyboard action gives enough resistance to allow control (not too loose), and allows us to feel the escapement, to play to it (the bump).

Parents who hope their children will eat their vegetables know that a salad of fresh and lovely delectable greens with a variety of colors and textures will inspire eating. Parents who hope to help their children will develop their musical potential will search for inspiring instruments.