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# Cultural Translation in Two Directions: The Suzuki Method in Japan and Germany

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## **Abstract**

### Cultural Translation in Two Directions: The Suzuki Method in Japan and Germany

The Suzuki Method represents a significant contribution by a Japanese, Suzuki Shin'ichi (1898-1998), to the teaching of musical instruments worldwide. Western observers often represent the method as "Japanese," although it could be called "Western" with equal justification. Suzuki left no detailed description of his method. Consequently, it is open to multiple interpretations. Its application, whether in Japan or elsewhere, represents an act of translation with its adaptation to local conditions involving creative processes rather than mere deviations from a supposedly fixed original.

To illustrate the importance of historical context, the author discusses Suzuki's life and work, sheds new light on the significance of his studies in Germany in the 1920s, and explains the method's success in Japan and abroad by examining local and historical circumstances. Besides Japan, the author focuses on Germany, where Suzuki received most of his formal musical education. In contrast to other Western countries, particularly North America, the method has been slow to spread in Germany, although Japanese and Germans sometimes like to point out cultural affinities between the two countries.

While this is an historical study, the suggested conclusion for music educators is that they judge the Suzuki Method on its pedagogical merits rather than on its Japanese provenance and that they continue the process of creative adaptation.

## Cultural Translation in Two Directions: The Suzuki Method in Japan and Germany

### Introduction(1)

The Suzuki Method represents a significant Japanese contribution to the teaching of musical instruments worldwide. Unlike other cultural pursuits that have come to the West from Japan, such as martial arts, however, the Suzuki Method developed in a field that is wholly Western in origin and even regarded as representing one of the supreme achievements of Western civilization.

Japan systematically adopted Western music in the Meiji Period (1868-1912) as part of its overall Westernization policy. The main official routes for the importation of Western music were the military, the imperial court and the public education system. So thorough was this process of assimilation that by the end of the Meiji period Western music and popular Japanese music influenced by it were widespread among the population. This development continued after the Second World War and today most Japanese are more familiar with Western music than with traditional Japanese music, which to their ears sounds as exotic as it does to Westerners.(2)

With Japanese musicians streaming into conservatories abroad, winning places in the world's top orchestras and gaining international recognition as soloists, and with Yamaha pianos and other Japanese musical products taking a large share of the international market, it is hardly surprising that Japan should also make a significant mark in the field of music pedagogy. Japan's education system has, after all, attracted worldwide attention.

Nevertheless, when the Suzuki Method became known in the West, starting with the United States from the late 1950s, critics were quick not only to point out the method's perceived weaknesses, but to question whether a method that originated in a totally different cultural environment could really be adopted in Western countries (Cook, 1970, p. 100; Herman, 1965, p. 53). That Japan within a few decades successfully adopted the music of an alien culture seemed to escape their consideration. Even so the method gained enormous popularity in the United States. In fact it is more popular in some Western countries than in Japan itself. The very term "Suzuki Method" was coined in the West and only later became current in Japan.

Enthusiasts as well as its critics, whether Japanese or Western, tend to emphasize the method's "Japaneseness" (Yoshihara, 2007, pp. 43-45). Western writers take the fact that Suzuki is Japanese and mentions Zen among his formative influences as sufficient evidence "that Suzuki's pedagogy was strongly influenced by Zen and the practice of Japanese traditional arts" (Madsen, 1990, p. 135). Some authors then go on to argue that Western proponents of Suzuki's ideas have not fully understood Suzuki and cannot fully appreciate the depths of his philosophy, a deficit they presumably seek to remedy (Bauman, 1994; Cook, 1970, p. preface). In this way Western observers often question the Western adoption of the Suzuki Method. The underlying assumption is that a cultural practice is somehow more authentic in the country of its origin than in the country which has "imitated" it. Rather than focusing on what is "lost in translation," however, recent research in the relationships between cultures has drawn attention to the fact that just as much is gained. Cross-cultural translation is a complex and dynamic process which deeply affects the way people perceive the world and define themselves. Translation processes, moreover, take place even within a culture (Gimpel & Thisted, 2007).

This article examines the Suzuki Method as an example of cultural translation in several directions: from the West to Japan, within Japan (from Suzuki Shin'ichi's ideas and teaching, to the practices of teachers and families), and from Japan to Western countries. After a brief discussion of the method, demonstrating that it is open to multiple interpretations, I focus on historical context as one of the main determinants of how translation takes place. In examining Suzuki's life and the influences on his method, I show the significance of his studies in Berlin, which have so far been neglected by writers intent on stressing the method's 'Japaneseness'. I then discuss the method's dissemination in Japan and abroad and argue that particular historical circumstances rather than the characteristics of the method itself have determined the different levels of success. Apart from Japan, I focus on Germany for two reasons. First, Suzuki received most of his formal musical education in Berlin. Secondly, Germany – in contrast to North America – has been one of the countries most reluctant to receive the Suzuki Method, despite (or because of?) supposed cultural affinities between Germany and Japan.(3)

Suzuki left no systematic description of his method in writing. Although his collected works fill six volumes (Suzuki, 1985b), most of them are sketchy and anecdotal. His best known work, *Ai ni ikeru/Nurtured by Love* (first published in Japanese in 1966, English translation 1969) is a mixture of autobiography, anecdotes, and general observations. His other writings are mostly short pieces originally published in periodicals such as the Talent Education Institute's own publications, which are often based on lectures and speeches. Suzuki himself acknowledged his

preference for working with his teachers in person (Starr, 2000, p. vi). Nearly all the literature on the Suzuki Method in English has been written by American Suzuki teachers. The Suzuki Association of the Americas includes on its website a brief, commentated bibliography.<sup>(4)</sup> The most comprehensive study on the method and its roots is Madsen's dissertation (Madsen, 1990). Lander's book is aimed at practitioners, especially of the piano; like Madsen it includes a comprehensive bibliography (Landers, 1995 (1980)). Dawley has analyzed the literature on Suzuki published between 1958 and 1978 see (Dawley, 1979, pp. 13-76). His conclusion about lack of scientific control and misunderstandings holds for many, although not all, more recent publications. Peak's study provides a good summary in the context of Japanese ideas about education, but is limited in scope (Peak, 1998). Treatments of the method usually include an account of Suzuki's life; much of the literature both in English and Japanese, however, uncritical if not hagiographical. Biographical accounts in English tend to rely almost solely on the information Suzuki himself gave in *Nurtured by Love* (Suzuki, 1983), which he never intended as an autobiography. His actual autobiography, *Aruite kita michi*, although more detailed, does not add a great deal of new information about his early life (Suzuki, 1985a).

This article, in addition to the main literature on Suzuki and his method, draws on literature that sheds light on general historical trends and developments in education in Japan and Germany, as well as on German literature about Suzuki and interviews and correspondence with two pioneers of the Suzuki Method in Germany and Europe, Kerstin Wartberg and Tove Detreköy.

### Outline of the Method

Suzuki began to develop his ideas about "talent education" in the 1930s. He preferred to describe his approach as the "mother tongue method." According to *Nurtured by Love*, he was suddenly struck by the fact that all Japanese children learn to speak Japanese, regardless of their supposed talent (Suzuki, 1983, p. 1). So he modelled his way of teaching music on the way children learn their first language: they start very early, they listen long before they speak, they learn by imitation and they learn to read and write after they have learnt to speak. Similarly, Suzuki children start early, as young as 3 or even 2 1/2; they listen to models first; they imitate the teacher, learning by ear and not reading music until they have mastered the basics of the instrument. Lessons include both individual and group lessons; individual lessons are often in the so-called master class format with other pupils and their parents watching. In fact heavy parental involvement – the parent acts as a substitute teacher between lessons – is one of the most characteristic features of the method.

Although Suzuki concentrated his efforts on the violin (later other musical instruments were taught by his method), he in principle believed that his ideas applied to any kind of skill. In fact, the goal of the education he postulated was not even primarily musical, but "to cultivate the qualities of sensitivity, service to others and nobility of character," and in his early writings he referred to a "Way of Music" (*ongakudō*) in analogy to Zen and training in the traditional arts (Peak, 1998, pp. 362-363).

Virtually all the individual elements of the method have precedents, although the way Suzuki combined and applied them is new and unique (Starr, 2000, p. v; Kendall, 1978, p. 13; Wartberg, 2004; Wickes, 1982). Many of Suzuki's ideas fit in with those of "compatible contemporaries," particularly Maria Montessori (Grilli, 1987, pp. 24-38).

Even the elements commonly described as "Japanese," can with equal justification be classified as "Western." Group instruction on the violin, was common in Europe. In the German-speaking countries, violin became a required subject for elementary school teachers, who were often taught in groups (Kolneder, 1998, p. 457). Even what Malm calls the "industrial distribution structure" (Malm, 2000, p. 203) of the Suzuki Method, had precedents in Europe. In 1897 the London-based instrument manufacturer and publishing house, J.G. Murdoch and Company established the Maidstone Movement of group violin instruction and in 1905, the National Union of School Orchestras. At the regular festivals at Crystal Palace or the Royal Albert Hall hundreds or even thousands of young violinists performed in groups. The movement became the model for public school instrumental classes in the U.S.A., from 1911 (Deverich, 1987). The association of the Suzuki Method primarily with group instruction is a primary example of changes to the method resulting from its adoption in the West (Dawley, 1979, pp. 46-47).

Listening and imitating as a means of learning have always been central to training in the performing arts including violin teaching, which "traditionally has consisted chiefly of the students following and imitating the teacher, a procedure that can be clarified only to a certain extent by written instruction" (Kolneder, 1998, p. 443). The emphasis on reading music from the start is typical of the Western art music tradition, but in the folk traditions people usually learnt by ear and often still do.

If we should single out one element as having particular appeal for the Japanese and which challenged Western assumptions more than anything else, it would be the emphasis on effort over inborn talent. The prevailing belief in the early twentieth century was – and to a large extent still is – that talent is something inborn or bestowed by God or, in Paganini's case, by the Devil. Developments in science in the nineteenth century resulted in more scientific approaches to teaching music, including an interest in the mechanics of violin playing. But at the same time romantic notions of genius persisted; child prodigies were popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Kolneder, 1998, p. 442).

Most if not all elements of Suzuki's method are thus open to multiple interpretations by both Japanese and Westerners. Indeed, one typical feature of training in the traditional arts in Japan is conspicuously absent from the Suzuki Method: the so-called *iemoto* system, where the hereditary master or *iemoto* strives to retain complete control over how the art is transmitted and the disciples, including their teacher, aim to follow the master as closely as possible. In some traditional arts the *iemoto* system has extended beyond Japan. Suzuki's emphasis on personally training teachers is similar to an *iemoto*'s; but he did not treat his method as a secret art. His personal teaching in Matsumoto, moreover, left much to the candidates' interpretation. Hersh and Peak, who both studied at the Institute in the 1970s, observed that no curriculum was spelt out, there was no explicit discussion of pedagogy and students were not expected to observe the teaching of small children. Foreign students often came after having undergone

teacher training in their home countries or returned to take a degree in teaching, but Japanese students most commonly entered straight after graduating from high school (Hersh & Peak, 1998, pp. 163, 169). Only towards the end of Suzuki's life does the training system appear to have become more formalized, but as a result of international trends rather than as a move towards the Iemoto system.<sup>(5)</sup>

Even if we assume that by the 1970s most of the Japanese students would themselves have learnt their instrument by the Suzuki Method, they would graduate without an explicit analysis and discussion of the method. While this may well have trained their character and enabled them to “apply these elements of their direct experience creatively to their work with students of whatever ages” (Hersh & Peak, 1998, p. 170), it also meant that the student's application of what they had learnt constituted a significant act of translation, regardless of whether they were Japanese or Western. Nevertheless discussions of the adaptation of the method in the West tacitly assume that the practices of Japanese teachers are somehow more “authentic.” Suzuki himself did not take this view. He believed the elements of a good education to be universal (Lützen, 1977) and encouraged the foreign teachers he taught to adapt his ideas in their own countries. For example, he told Helen Brunner to teach English children to sing and play scales, something he did not regard as necessary in Japan (Homfray, 2008, p. 52). Adaptation to other instruments has progressed without Suzuki's direct input, including a double bass version developed in the United States, a mandolin version in Italy (Homfray, 2008, p. 52) and a singing course in Finland (Wartberg, 2004, p. 9).

Consequently, Suzuki teachers add their own creative interpretation of the method to what they have learnt from Suzuki (Starr, 2000, p. v). Practices vary widely; some teachers and observers have remarked, for example, on the differences between America and Japan (Driver & Shields, 2000 (1976); Peak, 1998; Yoshihara, 2007). For Felicity Lipman, one of the pioneers of the method in Britain, he even was the only Suzuki teacher, and others may well share this view (Lipman, 1998). Lipman, Wartberg (Wartberg, 2004, p. 9) and others have also pointed out that Suzuki's ideas changed in the course of his long life; he was constantly reflecting on his method and practice.

In short, the method is open to varied interpretations, whether as “Japanese,” “Western,” (Yoshihara, 2007, p. 45) or universal.<sup>(6)</sup> The violinist Reginald H. Fink entitled his article, published in 1977, *The Timelessness of Suzuki*, in which he drew attention to similarities between Suzuki's teaching and C. H. Hohmann's *Practical Violin School*, and concluded, “There are so many similarities between the preface of Hohmann's *Practical Violin School* – which may possibly be up to 140 years old – and the Suzuki method, that one cannot help but wonder if Suzuki knew of this method when he developed his philosophy. Whether he did or not, the specific teachings of the Suzuki system obviously have a solid foundation in common-sense violinistic principles. The discovery of Hohmann's preface has shed new light on the universality, and timelessness, of what is known of the Suzuki method” (Fink, 1977, p. 83).

The answer to Fink's indirect question is almost certainly, yes. The German music pedagogue Christian Heinrich Hohmann (1811-61) published several instrumental tutors, including his “*Praktische Violinschule*” (*Practical Violin Method*, Nürnberg, 1849). Intended as a “solid

foundation for country schoolteachers” (Kolneder, 1998, p. 457), it went through several editions and was used widely in Germany and abroad. In Japan it was introduced from the 1870s when the imperial court musicians started learning Western instruments and used at the Music Investigation Institute (Matsumoto, 1995, pp. 11-12) and remained in common use in Japan until the 1960s (Kunikiyo, 2003, pp. 20-21). Even if Suzuki did not study from Hohmann himself – and he may well have done – he must have been aware of a violin tutor so widely used. The similarity to Hohmann indicates how much Suzuki was rooted in his time, as an examination of his biography will illustrate.

### Suzuki Shin’ichi and the Beginnings of Talent Education

Born 17 October 1898 in Nagoya as the third son of Suzuki Masakichi, the founder of Suzuki Violins, Shin’ichi graduated from Nagoya Commercial School in 1916. Suzuki Violins, having made affordable violins for the domestic market since the 1890s, benefitted hugely from WW I, when it exported to markets formerly in German hands. Like his elder brothers Umeo (b. 1889) and Rokusaburō (b. 1895), Shin’ichi was educated in the expectation that he would work in his father’s violin factory, which he did before and after his graduation.

A businessman whom Suzuki met while recovering from a bout of ill health in the countryside introduced him to Marquis Tokugawa Yoshichika (1886-1976), from the branch of the Tokugawa family that had ruled the domain of Owari from Nagoya Castle under the Tokugawa shoguns. In August 1919 the Marquis invited him on a research expedition to the Kurile Islands. The guests on the ship included Kōda Nobu (1870-1947), the first Japanese citizen sent abroad to study Western music in the 1890s and a professor at the Tokyo Academy of Music until she retired and established her own piano studio (Howe, 1995) (Mehl, 2007a). Kōda played the piano in the ship’s salon in the evenings, and sometimes Suzuki would join her with his violin.

Impressed with Suzuki’s playing, Kōda suggested that he study music seriously and introduced him to her sister Andō Kō (1878-1963), who had studied with Joseph Joachim in Berlin. Andō recommended that he prepare to enter the Tokyo Academy of Music, where she herself taught. Suzuki did not, however, follow his teacher’s recommendation. He continued to study with Andō privately until 1921, when Tokugawa Yoshichika invited him to join him on a world tour, suggesting that Suzuki stop off in Germany to study the violin. Suzuki Masakichi gave his support, and so Shin’ichi accompanied the Marquis to Marseille, from where he continued alone to Berlin. Suzuki studied in Berlin from autumn 1921 to spring 1928 (interrupted by a few months in Japan in 1925/26), when he returned to Nagoya with his German wife Waltraud.

At first the couple lived in the Suzuki family home. The family business, however, was faltering, and Shin’ichi had to earn a living independently. Together with three of his brothers, Fumio, Kikuo and Akira, he formed the Suzuki String Quartet. The brothers started rehearsing in Nagoya and occasionally performed on the local radio, but soon they moved to Tokyo. By then Japanese music education was producing enough soloists for the competition to be fierce, but chamber ensembles were still rare, and the Suzuki Quartet enjoyed considerable success. He also involved himself in music education. He became an instructor at Kunitachi Music School

and joined the students and teachers who left the school to found the Imperial School of Music (Teikoku Ongaku Gakkō) in 1931, which he ended up running until it folded during the war years.

Suzuki's background and early life were not untypical of his time, but the particular way in which he used his opportunities mark him as an unusually strong-minded individual who followed his inclinations rather than conform to social expectations. Although born at the end of the Meiji era, he seems to represent the "Meiji spirit," including what Ivan Parker Hall in his biography of Mori Arinori (1847 – 1889) described as the "temperamental individualism" of most of the leaders of the Meiji reforms (Hall, 1973, pp. 435-436), which enabled them to get on well with their individualistic Western counterparts, absorb new ideas and apply to bring about change in Japan even in the face of opposition. On the other hand, his strong-mindedness made him an outsider at home. Nomura Kōichi, one of the teachers at the Imperial School of Music and a leading music critic, described Suzuki as a man who liked to be master of his own house and could not work with others (Nomura, 1978, p. 261).

Developing his own method and starting his own school enabled Suzuki to become master of his own house after WW II. His first experiments with teaching young children, however, began in the 1930s. In 1932 Etō Toshiya, then four years old, became Suzuki Shin'ichi's "first small pupil" (Suzuki, 1983, p. 16). Suzuki was not sure how to teach such a small child, but then he discovered that he preferred teaching small children to young adults. He compiled collections of graded tunes, and soon taught several other children. Some later became well known violinists, including Toyoda Kōji, Kobayashi Takeshi and his brother Kenj, Suzuki Hidetarō, and Arimatsu Yōko.

Suzuki began to develop his method. He almost certainly received inspiration from the currents of educational reform which swept Japan in the 1920s and early 1930s; currents inspired by the New Education Movement that spread through North America and Europe from the late nineteenth century. Like their international counterparts Japanese reformers rejected the prevailing systems and teaching methods and emphasized ideas like an environment conducive to learning, respect for the individual child, and a holistic education based on the child's stage of development and experience that included practical subjects and the arts and that fostered emotional development as well as book learning.<sup>(7)</sup> Several educators founded their own private schools. One of them was Obara Kuniyoshi (1887-1977), who in 1929 founded Tamagawa Gakuen. Obara's education system laid great stress on training in the arts, and Obara shared Suzuki's view on the mother's role in a child's early education; he published several works on the subject.<sup>(8)</sup> Obara, later remarked on the affinity between his own views and Suzuki Shin'ichi's talent education (Obara, 1970-1971, p. 388).

The New Education Movement in Japan was part of an international trend and the same applies to Suzuki's educational ideas. Until further evidence emerges we cannot know whether Suzuki developed an interest in education during his years abroad, but they no doubt helped form his ideas about the role of music in human development and merit further investigation.



## Suzuki in Berlin and the Suzuki Method's European Roots

Observers emphasizing the method's Japaneseness, perhaps simply take its Western elements for granted, because of the method's application to learning Western musical instruments and a musical genre of Western origin. However, the introduction of Western music in Japan in general, and Suzuki's use of it in his talent education involved specific choices; choices which were by no means given. For example, Suzuki's elementary education (which he does not mention), most probably included singing lessons based on a repertoire of mostly foreign folk songs compiled from the 1880s onwards.<sup>(9)</sup> The original Suzuki violin repertoire, for example, reflects certain musical preferences, not to say prejudices, which will be discussed below. To this day Western music in Japan reflects some of the choices the Japanese made at the time of its introduction (Suchy, 1994). Consequently, when we study processes of cultural translation, we must examine the culture of origin as well as the destination culture (Lüsebrink & Reichardt, 1997, p. 16).

Suzuki received the greater part of his formal musical training in Berlin in the 1920s, and we can assume that these years exercised a lasting influence on him. Unfortunately, Suzuki's own writings provide little information beyond a couple of famous names and a few anecdotes; but we can attempt to picture the historical context he moved in.

Berlin in the 1920s was a good place to experience European art music. Leading musicians based in Berlin included Theodor Scheidl, Leonid Kreutzer (who would later move to Japan), Arthur Schnabel, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Paul Hindemith and Arnold Schönberg. Alfred Cortot, Pablo Casals and Fritz Kreisler visited regularly. Contemporary composers like Arnold Schönberg, Alban Berg, Béla Bartók, Leos Janáček, Igor Strawinsky, Paul Hindemith, Darius Milhaud, Arthur Honegger, Kurt Weill and Ernst Křenek presented their latest works (Grützen, 1988, pp. 117-118). But as well as experiencing all that was new in the arts, people could also cultivate their conservative attitudes, and despite the attacks on tradition across all the arts and especially music, the majority of music lovers in Berlin remained conservative in their tastes. "Real music" still meant the classics, especially the famous composers of the nineteenth century. Yehudi Menuhin remembered Berlin as "a bastion of the traditional world...Beethoven and Brahms were gods. Furtwängler and Walter were their vicars on earth." (Levenson, 2003, p. 323).

What little we learn from Suzuki himself suggests that he mostly associated with people who represented the traditional world described by Menuhin. His chosen violin teacher, Karl Klingler (1879-1971) is best remembered for his string quartet, which in different formations continued to perform until 1936. The quartet made its name performing the Classical and Romantic repertoire, centred on Brahms and Beethoven, although it did include the occasional work by contemporaries like Hindemith and Schönberg. It drew large audiences, including a core of chamber music lovers. Besides public concerts, Klingler performed frequently at concerts in private homes, including his own, where he regularly invited guests to chamber music evenings. Suzuki tells us that he chose Klingler after hearing him perform with his quartet and that, "My ultimate desire was not to become a performer but to understand art." (Suzuki, 1983, p. 76).

With Klingler, he concentrated on acquiring a large repertoire, including concertos, sonatas and chamber music.

Klingler may well have been the ideal teacher for Suzuki. After receiving his first violin lessons from his father, he moved to Berlin in 1897 to study violin with Joseph Joachim at the Hochschule für Musik. He also studied composition with Max Bruch and Robert Kahn. In 1899 he won the Mendelssohn Prize, and in 1901 he became concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra under Arthur Nikisch. Although he performed frequently as a soloist, his real interest was chamber music. In 1905 he formed the first Klingler quartet with Josef Rywkind, a Russian and a fellow-student of Joachim, his own brother Fridolin Klingler, and the Welshman Arthur Williams. In 1906/07 he also played the viola in Joachim's quartet. From 1904 – 36 Klingler taught at the Hochschule für Musik (Bollert, 1986; Potter, 2003). He composed and wrote several short treatises on violin playing (Klingler & Ritter, 1990). While his colleague, the famous teacher Carl Flesch, professor in Berlin from 1908 to 1926, devoted his writings to the physiological aspects of violin playing, Klingler's approach has been described as "philosophical" (Klingler & Ritter, 1990, p.viii). Although his technique was superb, his strength as a teacher lay in interpretation. In the words of his student Agnes Ritter, "he always sought the spiritual content and the mental design in the music. He did not allow technique to be an end in itself; it had to serve the music" (Klingler & Ritter, 1990, p. 155). Suzuki benefited from Klingler's reflective approach as well as from wide circle of acquaintances. Klingler invited him to his house concerts, where he met musicians, but also other members of the educated bourgeoisie, for whom making and appreciating music was part of their way of life.

Besides practising the violin (about five hours a day, he later reported), Suzuki attended concerts. The inflation, which caused the Germans so much grief worked to the advantage of Japanese students, whose allowance went a long way. Apparently Suzuki enjoyed the company of friends and acquaintances and attended house parties, which often included music. At one such house concert he met Waltraud Prange, an accomplished amateur pianist and singer. The two started going to concerts together, and in 1928 they married.

Just how much and what did Suzuki absorb during his Berlin years? Was he, for example, aware of the reform movements that transformed music education in schools in Germany in the early twentieth century, such as the activities of Fritz Jöde (1887-1970), then professor for music education at the Academy for Church and School Music in Berlin, who founded the first public music schools, or the comprehensive reforms of public music education introduced by Leo Kestenberg (1882-1962) in the 1920s? Until further evidence emerges we cannot know. Kerstin Wartberg, a pioneer of the Suzuki Method in Germany who came to know Suzuki Shin'ichi and Waltraud intimately during her studies in Matsumoto in the 1980s, believes that Suzuki devoted most of his time to practicing and going to concerts and later to courting Waltraud. He also converted to Catholicism during his courtship, and would have spent some time studying his new creed.[\(11\)](#)

One of the few Germans Suzuki mentions in his recollections is Albert Einstein. By the time Suzuki wrote, Einstein, already famous in the 1920s, had become an icon of the twentieth century and a popular name for any person to link their own with. Suzuki's relationship with

Einstein was surely less intimate than he suggests (Suzuki, 1983, pp. 76-77, 1985a). After all Einstein had a wide circle of friends and acquaintances and spent much time travelling in the 1920s – including a trip to Japan, where he stayed from 17 November to 29 December 1922, returning to Berlin via Palestine in February 1923.

Suzuki relates that he was introduced to Einstein by a Professor Michaelis, who had met Shin'ichi's father in Nagoya and asked Einstein to act as his “guardian” when he himself accepted an invitation to teach at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.<sup>(12)</sup> This account does not square with known facts. The Professor Michaelis in question is the biochemist Leonor Michaelis (1875-1949). After graduating as a medical doctor in Freiburg in 1897, he worked in Berlin. From 1906 to 1922 Michaelis headed the bacteriological department of the City Hospital in Berlin. In 1922 he accepted an invitation to become professor of biochemistry at the Aichi Prefectural Medical College (now the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Nagoya) where he taught until 1926, when he moved to Baltimore. From 1929 to 1940 he worked at the Rockefeller Institute of Medical Research in New York (Takeuchi, 1983, p. 437).

Although Michaelis does not usually feature in biographies of Einstein, the Einstein Archives includes a few letters from him, including one Michaelis sent from Baltimore dated 25 January 1927, in which he refers to “my young friend Suzuki-san” who visited Einstein with some of his father's violins.<sup>(13)</sup> Einstein and Michaelis may well have known each other in Berlin and met again during Einstein's visit to Japan shortly after Michaelis' arrival in Nagoya.<sup>(14)</sup> A letter from Michaelis dated 1931 mentions a visit by Einstein in America where they made music together. According to his daughter Eva, Michaelis was an accomplished pianist and performed publicly during his stay in Nagoya, including in a concert together with Suzuki Shin'ichi on 30 January 1926 (Yagi, 1975, p. ix). Michaelis' letter suggests that he gave Suzuki an introduction when they met in Nagoya, and that Suzuki subsequently visited Einstein. Einstein gave Suzuki a sketch of himself with the dedication “Herrn Shinichi Suzuki zur freundlichen Erinnerung/Albert Einstein November 1926” (Wartberg, 1999).

Given the scarcity of more conclusive evidence, however, Einstein and his well-documented musical interests may well shed some light on Suzuki's experience among the educated classes, whose participation in and attitudes towards music Einstein typified. This is suggested by the striking resemblance between Einstein's musical preferences and the Suzuki Method's core repertoire, which reveals a distinct bias towards music from the Baroque and Classical periods, especially Vivaldi, Bach and Mozart and a relative neglect of the Romantic and more modern periods. Einstein reportedly revered Mozart above all other composers. Johann Sebastian Bach, he also valued highly. He had little interest in the Romantics or the music of his own time.

Einstein, moreover, has been cited as an example of the role of music among the German-Jewish bourgeoisie, as has the “the other Einstein,” Alfred, a distant relative and the author of a book on Mozart. Both describe their respective mothers as being responsible for their musical education; Jewish mothers typically played an important role in shaping modern German-Jewish identity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Kaplan, 1994). Music represented an important part of this identity; it acted as an “entry” qualification to assimilation for Jews emerging from the Ghettos (Botstein, 1991, p. 126). At the conservatoire in Vienna at

the end of the nineteenth century, a high proportion of pianists and violinists were Jews. Jewish violinists whose fame reached and inspired Japanese musicians include Joseph Joachim, Misha Elman, Fritz Kreisler Jasha Heifetz and Yehudi Menuhin.(15)

Indeed, when Japanese virtuosos began to attract international attention, they seemed to be taking the place of the Jews (Henahan, 1968). One might even argue that Western music played a similar role for the Japanese as for the Jews; both peoples were long secluded from mainstream Western civilization before emerging to absorb it with explosive energy (Shillony, 1991, pp. 53-61). Although the comparison may not be carried very far, it does suggest that the significance of Western art music for Jewish assimilation in the 19th century might provide a useful reference in considering the case of Japan; not only in the nineteenth century, but also in the decades after WWII. While Suzuki himself may not have been aware of such connections, his years in Berlin presumably not only heightened his awareness of the spiritual dimensions of music, but also of the role of music in the lives of the people he met and of the German educated classes in general.

Whether Suzuki also absorbed any ideas connected with the movements for renewal and reform in the arts and in education, including music education, we can only speculate about, but we can observe that he was part of a trend when he began developing his ideas about education in the 1930s. Likewise, after 1945, Suzuki was one of several educators who redoubled their efforts to spread their ideas for reform, including Obara Kuniyoshi (Mehl, 2007b, 2008).

### The spread of Talent Education in Japan

After WWII, Suzuki moved to Matsumoto, where a group that included a former colleague at the Imperial Music School planned to open a new school, the Matsumoto Music School, established in September 1946. In December the National Association of People Interested in the Education of Small Children (Zenkoku Yōji Kyōiku Dōshikai) followed, renamed the Talent Education Research Association (Sainō Kyōiku Kenkyūkai) in 1948. Their aim was to publish Suzuki Shin'ichi's writings and to spread Suzuki's principles through lecture tours with performances, by Suzuki's pupils.

The postwar years were characterized by a strong enthusiasm for cultural pursuits, made possible by growing economic wealth. More and more people wanted to pursue music as a leisure activity or give their children the opportunities they themselves missed (Havens, 1982, pp. 181, 187-195; Yoshihara, 2007, p. 33). The enormous prestige of Western music, its place in the expanding public school system, and its role as a symbol of Western civilization as a whole resulted in more and more parents choosing a Western instrument for their child. The mid-1950s saw a "violin boom" (Kunikiyo, 2003, pp. 20-21); later the piano became the most popular instrument, when mass production by Yamaha and Kawai made it affordable for middle class families.(16)

Although Suzuki was not the only one to work to spread music education in the early years after the war, he was one of the first. To many he Suzuki appeared like a beacon in the bleak years

following capitulation (Noda, 2006, pp.112-113). Interest in Talent Education spread rapidly; in 1949 there were 35 branches of his violin class nationwide, teaching 1,500 children. The following year, 1950, the Ministry of Education authorized the Talent Education Research Institute as a corporate body. Suzuki's ideas were applied to infant education in general besides music teaching; in 1948 they were introduced at Hongō Primary School. The Matsumoto Music School set up a kindergarten department in 1949, and in the next few years several kindergartens introduced programmes inspired by Suzuki.

In 1951 the first summer school was held with 109 children and 11 teachers from all over Japan attending. It became a yearly event, as did national workshops for teachers from 1956, and "graduation ceremonies," where pupils performed set pieces to mark the completion of a grade; at first one for violin pupils in Tokyo in 1953, 196 pupils performed. Particularly spectacular were the yearly National Conventions and grand concerts. The first one was held at the Tokyo Metropolitan Hall with 2,000 children performing on the violin in the presence of members of the imperial family and diplomatic representatives of several foreign countries. The spectacle of thousands of children from as little as four years old playing well-known and often difficult works from the classical repertoire presented compelling evidence of the method's effectiveness; it soon became known abroad and contributed significantly to the spread of the method beyond Japan.

Nevertheless, in Japan the Suzuki Method did not achieve the same pre-eminence as in America. The Japanese media took little notice of the success achieved on the Suzuki children's first American tour (Honda, 2002, p. 136). Suzuki was far from the only one who catered to the growing demand, and to this day in Japan Suzuki teachers and schools compete with other systems of music education which often share some of the Suzuki Method's characteristics, such as the emphasis on starting early. In 1948 Saitō Hideo (1902-1974), a cellist and conductor who, like Suzuki, had studied music in Germany in the 1920s, opened the Music School for Children in Tokyo together with several other leading musicians.<sup>(17)</sup> Saitō's emphasis was on giving children a firm grounding which would enable them to become professionals. Two years later an orchestra was organized with Saitō as conductor. In 1952 a coeducational music department was opened at Tōhō Girls' High School and in 1955 Tōhō Gakuen Junior College was established, succeeded by Tōhō Gakuen School of Music in 1961. Branch schools were established in other parts of the country. The orchestra toured America for the first time in 1964, the same year as the Suzuki children, and its successes attracted rather more media attention in Japan. Many Japanese professional musicians received their early education at Saitō's school.

Even for the less ambitious, music programmes other than Suzuki's offered music education for pre-school children, including the chains of schools operated by the big music stores (Ōmori, 1987, pp. 280-284). Both Yamaha and Kawai began offering music classes from the mid-1950s and soon established branch schools nationwide. They both opened overseas schools in the U.S. in the 1960s and later in Europe, starting with Germany. Neither Yamaha nor Kawai, have achieved the same high profile as Suzuki's Talent Education abroad, but in Japan they attract large numbers of pupils. The Yamaha approach shares certain assumptions with the Suzuki Method; the value of musical training for character development and the belief that everybody can learn to make music. Both stress the importance of starting early and of parental

involvement. Both use a common repertoire of music, although the Yamaha repertoire is more diverse in style. Yamaha pedagogy, like Suzuki's method stresses learning by imitation of excellent models and the importance of movement in training (Mönig, 2005, pp. 186-189).

The Suzuki Method undoubtedly in part appealed to the Japanese because many of its principles harmonized with popular assumptions about education and the characteristics of training in the traditional arts (Peak, 1998). More significant, however, is the attraction of particular principles when applied to Western art music in a specific historical situation. The widely held belief that effort is more important than inborn talent and can overcome formidable difficulties is particularly attractive to the Japanese community when it comes to Western music, where they feel they have a disadvantage.(18) The Suzuki Method, by involving the parents, particularly the mothers, enabled them together with their children to overcome this perceived disadvantage and participate actively in the appropriation of a highly-regarded culture.

The deliberate reliance on the mother (rarely the father) as a home teacher between lessons was possible because the increase of urban nuclear families where the mother did not work outside the home to contribute to the family income and was expected to devote all her time to household and children. The "education mum" (kyōiku mama) emerged; the kept wife of a white-collar worker with time to devote to her children's education, whether school work or other activities. On the other hand, Japanese kyōiku mama often developed a level of involvement that went beyond what Suzuki envisaged, and caused trouble when they became over-ambitious, pushing their child too hard and showering it with negative criticism (Cook, 1970, p. 18; Starr, 2000, p. 19). Kumagai Shūko, a Suzuki piano teacher reports her ambivalence when she heard a mother relate how she helped her child learn to play the first piece using both hands amid tears of frustration and anger. While admiring the mother's perseverance, Kumagai nevertheless reflected that this went against Suzuki's idea; children should progress in very small steps so that they would never feel that a piece was too difficult (Kumagai, 2004, p. 12). Moreover, Suzuki discouraged rivalry and competition, but given the high level of competitiveness in the school examination system and other areas of life in urban Japan, it seems likely that a competitive attitude did find its way into many Suzuki classrooms.(19)

In fact the competitive demands of society and the perceived necessity to see their children through the best schools and into a prestigious job meant that many parents did not encourage their children to continue to study a musical instrument once they entered middle school, by which time violinists had often completed the ten Suzuki books (Driver & Shields, 2000 (1976)).(20) In other words, whatever Suzuki himself had in mind, the actual practice of his method in Japan may well justify Western criticism of rigid drill and stifling of individuality and childlike impulses, at least in some cases. Parents who aspired to a professional career for their children on the other hand, did not choose Suzuki teachers, or they sent their children to other teachers after the beginning stages (Denton, 1993, p. 805). (21)

Suzuki's method continues to occupy a firm place in music education in Japan, but it is one method among several competing methods with in part similar aims.

## The Suzuki Method Abroad: Germany

The most remarkable feature of Suzuki's Talent Education compared to other systems of music education in Japan is its fame abroad. The very name "Suzuki Method" originated in the West and has only recently come in use in Japan (Suzuki mesōdo).

The annual concerts in Tokyo were attended by foreign dignitaries, who helped spread news of the method. Soon internationally famous musicians became interested and their endorsement contributed to its prestige within Japan and its international renown. One of the first was Pablo Casals, whom Suzuki especially revered and who in 1961 attended a concert held in Tokyo to honour him. Other world-famous artists who visited Suzuki and his pupils were Arthur Grumiaux, David Oistrakh, Marcel Moise, William Primrose, Yehudi Menuhin, Alfred Cortot, and Mstislav Rostropovich; all were impressed by Suzuki's work (Wartberg, 1999, pp. 31-36).

At the same time Japanese musicians, among them several Suzuki pupils, were beginning to make a name for themselves abroad, winning competitions and gaining admission to professional orchestras. Suzuki's first child pupil, Etō Toshiya, studied at the Curtis Institute, gave his début in Carnegie Hall and taught at Curtis from 1953 to 1961 before continuing his career as a soloist and teacher in Japan. Another early pupil, Toyoda Kōji, became the first Japanese to be appointed leader of an orchestra in Europe, the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra (Wartberg, 1999, p. 36). Ironically, although Suzuki did not aim to train professionals, it was the professional success of some of his students that helped his method gain recognition. This was also true of Suzuki students in the Western countries where the method was adopted, such as Denmark.

An important reason for the international dissemination of the Suzuki Method lies in the missionary zeal of some of Suzuki's supporters and – not least – their English language skills. Suzuki's wife Waltraud translated his works into English and handled the foreign correspondence. One of Suzuki's earliest supporters, Honda Masaaki, had lived in America as a boy; he organized and led the foreign tours.

The first foreign country to adopt the Suzuki Method was the United States. In 1958 Mochizuki Kenji, then a student at Oberlin Graduate School of Theology, brought to America a film showing thousands of children playing Bach's Double Concerto and showed it to Clifford Cook, professor of stringed instruments and music education at Oberlin College Conservatory of Music. Cook was impressed (Cook, 1959, p. 41). The film was shown to others and caused a veritable "Suzuki Explosion" (Mills & Murphy, 1973, p. i). So great was the enthusiasm for the Suzuki Method that many teachers set themselves up as Suzuki teachers with minimal qualifications or knowledge of the method. Eventually, serious teachers began to organize themselves and establish training programmes for Suzuki teachers, inviting Suzuki to give workshops.

The frequent misuse of Suzuki's name in North America is one of the reasons why European Suzuki teachers strove to organize themselves and systematize teacher training early on. By the time the Suzuki Method began to attract serious interest in Europe, in the 1970s, it was already

well established in North America, and was introduced to Europe from North America as well as directly from Japan. Initially it was slow to take root in most countries. One reason may well be that knowledge of the Method began to spread at a time when Japan was attracting attention – and fear – in other fields as a result of its “economic miracle.”<sup>(22)</sup> As Japan’s gross national product overtook that of one European country after the other, the media painted a sinister picture of hoards of Japanese businessmen, the modern-day samurai, conquering Europe, masterminded by “Japan Inc” and its most awesome representative, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI). Books with titles like *The Japanese Challenge; Japan: The Planned Aggression; The Japanese Threat; The Japanese Industrial Challenge; Japan: Monster or Model; The Japanese Miracle and Peril; Stop the Japanese Now*, portrayed Japan as a polluted monster, where economic animals, or robots, living in inhuman conditions single-mindedly pursued economic conquest.

In such a climate, films showing hundreds of Suzuki children playing classical music with great precision and serious expressions fitted in only too well with the prevailing warlike images. A German book about musical life in Japan published in 1967 includes a picture, presumably from a Suzuki concert, of a large number of children, with the caption, “Japanese children, who perform concertos by Vivaldi, Bach, or Mozart in hundreds with identical bowing and articulation.” Another picture below it shows a scene from the Yamaha piano factory in Hamamatsu, reinforcing the image of factory-like mass production projected by the children (Borris & Verband Deutscher Musikerzieher und konzertierender Künstler, 1967, p. 145). Criticism of the perceived “military-style” drill was for many the obvious reaction. On the other hand, as in America, the performance by small children of classical pieces previously regarded as too difficult for them, could not fail to impress, and in music teaching as in other areas, some experts advocated learning from Japan. Learning martial arts or even management techniques from the Japanese, however, was not quite the same as looking for lessons in classical music, something Europe tends to claim a special ownership of. Propagators of the method often had to contend with deeply ingrained resistance. This is particularly true of Germany, where a sense of musical domination persists among the intellectual elite (Riethmüller, 2002).

Germans, and even more so Japanese, tend to invoke a “traditional” friendship between the two countries going back to the Meiji period (1868 – 1912), when German teachers helped the Japanese build up their own expertise in many areas, including music, and many Japanese studied in Germany. Cultural relations between Germany and Japan have usually been good, despite political and economic tensions. The 1960s saw a high level of cultural exchange and cooperation. In 1963, the International Society for Music Education World Conference took place in Japan. Encouraged by its success, Japan in 1965 hosted the first Asian Music Education Seminar; foreign speakers included Siegfried Borris from Germany. In this climate the Association of German Music Educators and Performing Artists (Verband Deutscher Musikerzieher und konzertierender Künstler) commissioned a comprehensive documentary of musical life in Japan (Borris & Verband Deutscher Musikerzieher und konzertierender Künstler, 1967), the first of its kind in Germany. The book, edited by Borris with contributions by Japanese experts and translations from Japanese sources, begins with an historical outline and then goes on to detail the organization of mainly Western art music in Japan, including, among



other things, orchestra and ensembles, individual musicians, music education, retail, associations, and research.

Apart from the picture referred to above and its caption, which does not name Suzuki, Suzuki and his method are only mentioned in passing. A brief note states that music education of pre-school children is highly controversial, and reference is made to a section later in the book (Borris & Verband Deutscher Musikerzieher und konzertierender Künstler, 1967, pp. 153, 181 – 186), in which two articles about early music education from the December 1964 issue of the magazine *Ongaku Geijutsu* (Musical Art) are quoted in translation. The first one summarizes a recent debate, quoting extensively from articles in other periodicals. The Suzuki Method is not mentioned at all; the debate raged around the American tour of the string orchestra from Tōhō School of Music in 1964, the same year as the first Suzuki tour. The Tōhō tour was well received in America.<sup>(23)</sup> Nevertheless Japanese critics of the “Tōhō system” voiced concerns commonly expressed by Western critics of the Suzuki method: the harsh discipline (Nomura Kōichi even compared it to the Nazi military), the teaching in groups, and the lack of freedom and individuality. Nomura also features in the second article, based on a round table discussion. He spoke favourably of Suzuki (his colleague of the 1930s) and his method, pointing out that it was not primarily intended to produce performers. But while praising Suzuki, Nomura was scathing of his assistants, whom he saw as wanting to train musical specialists.

For Germans interested in music education in Japan, Borris’ book, published by a major music publisher (Bärenreiter), provided accessible, comprehensive, if selective and often superficial information. But specific information in German on Suzuki remained scarce.<sup>(24)</sup> Even so, music teachers were interested, and in 1975 representatives of the Association of German Music Schools (Verband deutscher Musikschulen, VdM) visited Suzuki in Japan to learn more. In 1976 the Association initiated a pilot project to establish whether the Suzuki Method could be successfully introduced in Germany. The project sought to answer five questions:

1. What are the special characteristics of the Suzuki Method?
2. Does dispensing with written music represent a major problem?
3. How would the method have to be modified if its introduction depended on modifications?
4. What is the method’s potential effect on the development of “creativity”?
5. Is a method that has been most successful in the Far East suitable for adoption in central Europe? (Verband deutscher Musikschulen, n.d.; 1981?, p. 12).

In his final report Diethard Wucher, the Association’s chairman and the project’s director gave three reasons for the interest in the Suzuki Method: 1. The perceived need to start instrumental lessons at a younger age than the currently common age of ten, so that they would follow immediately upon completion of the new programmes of early music education for pre-school children. In the last ten to fifteen years, new, more child-centred, rather than instrument- or music-centred methods had been developed. 3. The desire to apply the latest research in learning psychology to teaching musical instruments. In short, interest in the Suzuki Method came at a time when pedagogues were looking for new ways of teaching without yet having found solutions. To ensure that the results would have a measure of scientific validity, a

professor from the conservatoire in Köln, Ludolf Lützen, was appointed. Beginning in September 1976, the project concluded in summer 1979 with a conference in Munich.

In November 1976 the Association sent a team of experts for the instruments violin, cello, piano and flute to Japan, where they met Suzuki himself and observed lessons at the Matsumoto institute and elsewhere. The experts then acted as a source of information for the participating teachers. Initially, 57 teachers from 19 music schools throughout Germany and 315 children were involved,<sup>(25)</sup> although not all continued. Each teacher taught selected pupils according to what they had learned about Suzuki's principles on the basis of literature and a film on the method, the Suzuki tutors and information from the experts who had visited Japan. Teachers attended workshops with trained Suzuki teachers from America, Denmark and Holland. They submitted data in form of lesson reports, questionnaires, periodic reports (after 12 lessons), pictures and tapes, and reports from the instrumental subject groups. Interestingly, the participating teachers were attracted to the Suzuki Method by information from the music schools rather than sensationalist accounts in the media (p.24). Teaching arrangements had to be adapted to the fairly rigid structure of the music schools, but combined individual and group lessons. In the violin group the individual lessons were conducted in groups of three to four children with the pupils observing each other's lessons.

The overall conclusion of the project was positive; the method could be applied in German music schools. The VdM recognized that further practical training of the teachers and better information for the parents about their role would be needed. It was after all the intention of the initiators to use the report as a basis for further work as Wucher stated in his final report (Verband deutscher Musikschulen, n.d.; 1981?).

The reports from the individual instrumental groups were likewise positive, except for the flute group, who judged the current Suzuki material for flute unsuitable. The report from the violin group pointed out that Suzuki's overall educational aims corresponded to those of German music schools. Concerning Suzuki's basic principles (as the group understood them), the early start, learning by ear and imitation, combination of individual and group lessons, parental involvement, and the violin repertoire, the group was largely positive, although it did stress the need for modifications and for supplementary material. Overall, the violin group urged maximum flexibility in the application of the principles. The main divergence from Suzuki was the group's recommendation that lessons should normally start at age 6 or 7, after completing the music schools' early music education programme, rather than at 3 or 4 years. This point, however, remained controversial.

Interestingly, the report tended to downplay the innovative elements of the Suzuki Methods and stressed the similarity with existing practices.<sup>(26)</sup> This may well be a result of the participants' failure to fully understand the method and appreciate that despite familiar elements it represented an innovation. But the perceived similarities with other systems may well have meant that the participants in the VdM project were not sufficiently motivated to make the necessary effort to learn more about Suzuki once the project had finished. In the questionnaires several string teachers stated that they were familiar with the approach of Egon Sassmanshaus, whose teaching method became known through his presentations at German and European

conferences in the late 1960s and early 1970s. His *Early Start on the Violin* was first published in German in 1976. Sassmanshaus taught children from the ages of four to six at a time when starting at ten was still considered normal (Sassmanshaus, 2008, pp. 63-64). His approach differed significantly from Suzuki's. (27)

Without doubt, the VdM project was highly problematic. Neither the organizers nor the teachers had sufficient insight into or training in the Suzuki Method to evaluate it in all its complexities. In fact, the report recognized financial and organizational constraints as well as the low level of information and training among the participants as a problem (p. 42). However, given the limited availability of expertise in Germany at the time and the fact that in other European countries too, Suzuki education was still in its infancy, one has to ask what alternatives the VdM had. Sending a sufficient number of teachers to be trained in Matsumoto or inviting expert teachers from Japan or America would have been costly and the results would still have been limited in scale. America was in any case too different for its experience to impress German sceptics.

Since the report and its conclusions are largely positive, it would seem that the pilot project need not in itself have been damaging to the introduction of the Suzuki Method in Germany. But it did little to further the method. There was no systematic follow-up and the VdM collected no data on the number of music schools that continued to work with the Suzuki Method. (28) Publications by the VdM do not deal with the Suzuki Method or mention it only in passing. In 1990, the then chairman of the VdM, Reinhart von Gutzeit, told the German Suzuki Institute that many music schools included the Suzuki Method among their teaching methods and that the Institute played a valued role as the only German institution offering training for Suzuki teachers (Wartberg, 2004, p. 13).

Given this attitude of benign neglect from official quarters, serious study as well as propagation of the Suzuki method was left to the initiatives of private individuals. The first German pioneer of the method to study in Matsumoto for a substantial period of time was Kerstin Wartberg. Wartberg, who graduated in violin performance and teaching from Cologne, first heard about Suzuki through a Japanese fellow-student. In 1979 she attended the International Suzuki Workshop in Munich; most of the other participants came from Japan or the United States. She met Suzuki and received a formal invitation to the Talent Education Institute in Matsumoto. With this and with the support from Ludolf Lützen, the professor who took part in the VdM's pilot project, she received a scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), which enabled her to study with Suzuki in Matsumoto from 1980 to 1982. (29)

Meanwhile, the first European Suzuki teachers established a formal organization, the European Suzuki Association (ESA) in 1980. (30) Like Suzuki himself, serious Suzuki teachers felt the need to establish a system of authorizing qualified teachers. The founding members included Tove and Bela Detreköy who pioneered the method in Denmark and Marianne-Migault Klingler (1922-1991), the daughter of Suzuki's teacher Karl Klingler and a psychologist and teacher. (31) The Karl Klingler Foundation, which Marianne Klingler had established the year before, gave financial support with the aim of furthering Suzuki's approach to education in Europe. Today ESA acts as an umbrella organization for the national associations, of which there are

twenty.(32) Already in 1980, ESA devised a certification system to regulate Suzuki teaching. It has since been granted the sole rights to the Suzuki name in its area by the International Suzuki Association (established in 1983), and only qualified teachers belonging to its member associations have the legal right to call themselves “Suzuki teachers.”

Marianne Klingler also initiated the establishment of the German Suzuki Association and Institute in 1983, after Kerstin Wartberg returned from Matsumoto. The Association and the Institute have since been separated; the German Suzuki Association (DSG) supports Suzuki music education and the work of the German Suzuki Institute (DSI) which conducts teacher training.(33)

For Suzuki, who had spent some of his formative years in Germany, it must have been gratifying to welcome a German student in Matsumoto. Wartberg developed a close relationship with Suzuki and particularly with his German wife Waltraud and returned to Matsumoto for shorter periods several times between 1981 and 1987.(34) Wartburg soon realized that Suzuki was at his best in practical lessons with a limited audience; she made careful notes after lessons, often in the evenings, and later incorporated her observations into her publications, such as her Step By Step series (published by Alfred Publishing, Los Angeles).(35)

In 1987 Kerstin Wartberg acted as director of the 8th Suzuki Method International Conference in (West) Berlin with around four thousand active participants from thirty-two countries. For the Suzukis this was their first visit to Berlin together in 59 years. During the conference, Suzuki’s former pupil Toyoda Kōji conducted Karl Klingler’s violin concerto, with Rudolf Gähler (concertmaster of the Beethoven Orchestra in Bonn) and the Berlin Symphonic Orchestra (Wartberg, 2004, pp. 47-48).

Suzuki and his method had come full circle. But in Germany the Suzuki Method still has a niche existence. With the inconclusive results of the VdM’s pilot project, further progress in the introduction of the Suzuki Method has been limited to private initiatives. These, however, compete with a highly organized system of public music schools. The largest Suzuki department at a German music school is the Suzuki Academy at the music school attached to the Hofer Symphoniker in the city of Hof. Established in 1978 and still the only one of its kind, the school added a Suzuki Academy in 1994.(36)

## Conclusion

Central to the Suzuki Method is the person of Suzuki Shin’ichi. By all accounts he was a highly charismatic personality. Western teachers who studied with him remark that he certainly did not seem “typically Japanese” to them. To Tove Detreköy, one of the first Europeans to study in Matsumoto, he appeared Japanese in Denmark, but seemed Western in Japan. Kerstin Wartberg, the first German to graduate from the Matsumoto Institute, describes him as open, spontaneous, lively and full of humour and in no way conforming to the stereotypical image of the Japanese.(37)

Suzuki's method likewise cannot easily be classified as Japanese or Western. He taught by personal inspiration rather than by a system he had set down in detail, and he expected the teachers he trained to do the same. Consequently, translation of the method takes place at the level of each individual teacher, whether inside Japan or abroad. Nevertheless, in Japan, during Suzuki's lifetime transmission to some extent worked along the lines of the iemoto system common in the traditional arts. Aspiring Suzuki teachers trained with the "master," Suzuki, until he deemed them ready for graduation, and the training focused strongly on development of the trainee's character rather than pedagogy. But even in Japan, Suzuki's books were freely available. Suzuki's willingness to let others take initiatives, as well as his naïveté in practical and business matters had two main consequences—first, the immense diversity in the practice of the method and, second, its global organization, which is highly structured, but independent of its founder and his successors in Japan.

The most visible sign of diversification is a flood of additional materials on the Suzuki method, from explanations of Suzuki's philosophy to materials for teachers and students, as well as additional repertoire and exercises both for solo and ensemble use. The method has been extended to instruments not initially taught by Suzuki and his close associates; viola, string bass, guitar, harp, organ, recorder, and voice.(38) The German Suzuki Institute claims to be the only Suzuki institute worldwide devoted to the development of new teaching materials as well as teacher training. Wartberg's Step by Step series is based on notes she made during her study in Matsumoto and was published with Suzuki's permission. Several of the volumes are available in English, French and Spanish, but not in Japanese.(39) In Japan, if the Zen-On online catalogue is anything to go by, only very few additional materials are widely available.(40) The Diversification is also reflected in the different settings for the practice of the method. As a result of the (erroneous) equation of the Suzuki Method with group teaching, some music educators have developed Suzuki programmes in the context of group teaching in public schools. In Japan, on the other hand, Suzuki instrumental lessons almost always take place in private studios.

The second development is in part a reaction to diversification; the desire to preserve the integrity of the Suzuki Method has produced a network of national and regional organizations, as well as a global one. Efforts to protect the name Suzuki internationally came from the foreign teachers, albeit strongly encouraged and supported by Suzuki. In America this happened only after his name was widely appropriated by teachers without much understanding of his principles (Wartberg, 1999). To avoid similar developments, European pioneers of the method strove to organize themselves and to formalize teacher training almost from the start. Today, the EAS is part of the International Suzuki Association (ISA), founded in 1983 in Dallas, Texas as a coalition of Suzuki Associations throughout the world and comprising the Talent Education Research Institute (TERI) of Japan, the Asian Suzuki Association (ASA), the ESA (which also represents Africa and the Middle East), The Suzuki Association of the Americas, and the Pan-Pacific Suzuki Association (PPSA).(41)

The activities of the Suzuki associations center on teacher training and accreditation. Tove Detreköy suspects that teacher training in Europe is better than in Japan.(42) She may well be right, at least until fairly recently; Suzuki training in Japan for a long time depended on the personal teaching of Suzuki himself. Only in 1997 did the International Academy of the Suzuki

Method in Matsumoto become accredited by the government as a specialist training college, and upgraded to a professional training college in 2003.(43) Teacher training courses, including entry requirements, have been formalized.(44)

Thus the global organization of the Suzuki Method has affected its practice in Japan, although further research would have to analyze this process in detail. Globalization has increased the visibility of the “Suzuki mesōdo” in Japan; it has linked Japanese practitioners to an international network, and may well have helped improve the quality of teacher training in accordance with standards set internationally.

The spread and the development of the Suzuki method outside Japan proves those critics wrong who claim that a “Japanese” method cannot be applied successfully in other countries. Clearly, the method is sufficiently open to be adapted to a wide range of local circumstances. So what accounts for the method’s success? Firstly it is largely based on sound pedagogical principles which recent research tends to support (Heitkämper, 1998). Secondly, and even more importantly, however, we need to look beyond the method itself to the historical contexts in which it originated and developed. This will also explain why the method was not equally successful everywhere. The method’s rapid dissemination in Japan in the immediate aftermath of WWII depended on the special significance of Western music in Japan and the circumstances of its appropriation. The messages the Japanese received about music when they turned to the West from the nineteenth century onwards, including the perceived superiority of Western and German art music, continued to exercise a powerful influence after 1945, and indeed to this day. In this context, Suzuki’s experience in Berlin is just as significant as his early years in Japan; he went to Berlin having studied with a teacher who was trained in the German musical tradition, Andō Kō, and received most of his formal musical training in Germany.

Turning to the West, the contrast between the enthusiasm for, and the explosive spread of the method in the U.S. and its much slower progress in Europe is striking. Again, historical circumstances provide the most plausible explanation. The case of America may well have some similarities with Japan: “Suzuki’s belief in individualism and democracy, his emphasis on the mother’s role as defined in bourgeois domestic terms, and the choice of Western music as a tool for human development were also quite in accord with dominant American ideologies of the postwar decades” (Yoshihara, 2007, p. 40). Moreover, America, like Japan, has had a tendency to accept the cultural superiority of Europe in classical music.

In Europe, on the other hand, the sense of cultural superiority, as well as the stereotypical images of Japan reinforced in the discourses spawned by Japan’s spectacular economic growth just as the Suzuki method became known in the 1970s, often caused the method to be regarded with suspicion. Helen Brunner, who pioneered the method in Britain, has described England, Germany and France as particularly reluctant to adopt the method, while countries more open to innovation like Scandinavia and Iceland offer less resistance (Homfray, 2008, p. 48). In Germany, a highly organized musical establishment and the lingering belief in Germany’s musical superiority means that the method is confined to a niche existence, detailed information in German is scarce and stereotypes persist, even in the works of otherwise benign authors (Heitkämper, 2000, pp. 468-473, 471).

This article has highlighted both the openness of Suzuki's method to multiple interpretations and applications, and the significance of the historical contexts in which it originated, developed, and diversified as a result of creative adaptation. For the historian, the Suzuki Method presents a useful case study for processes of cultural translation as well as the tensions between globalization and local diversity. For the music educator, an insight into these processes may well provide encouragement to judge the Suzuki Method on its pedagogical merits rather than on its Japanese provenance and to continue the process of creative adaptation.

## Notes

- 1) I thank Kerstin Wartberg and Tove Detreköy for telling me about their firsthand experience with the Suzuki Method and Mari Yoshihara for letting me read an unpublished paper. The completion of this article was made possible through an Edward T. Cone Membership in Music Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. Japanese names are given in accordance with Japanese custom with the surname first. [view reference](#)
- 2) For recent accounts of this process in English see (Galliano, 2002) (Wade, 2005). [view reference](#)
- 3) The interest in Suzuki in North America is well documented. See for example (Cook, 1970; Kendall, 1978); more recently (Yoshihara, 2007). [view reference](#)
- 4) <http://suzukiassociation.org/parents/bibliography/> ; A bibliography of research findings concerning the method's effectiveness can be found at [http://www.ithaca.edu/music/strings/education/suzuki\\_bibliography.html](http://www.ithaca.edu/music/strings/education/suzuki_bibliography.html) (both accessed 15 September 2009). [view reference](#)
- 5) See Conclusion. [view reference](#)
- 6) This type of discourse can also be found in the discussion of Japan's traditional schools: (Mehl, 2003, p. 225) and (Mehl, 2009). [view reference](#)
- 7) On the New Education Movement in Japan: (Ehmcke, 1979, pp. 43-61; Nakano, 1968; Obara, 1970-1971) (Nakano, 2002 ) (Okita & Tsujimoto, 2002). [view reference](#)
- 8) Obara's publications on the subject include Haha no tame no kyōikugaku [A Pedagogy for Mothers] in two volumes (1925-6).; Fujin mondai to kyōiku [The Women Question and Education] (1920), Nihon josei no yukue (1933), and Ijin no haha (1936). [view reference](#)
- 9) The best source in English on this is (Eppstein, 1994). See also Sondra Wieland Howe, "Sources of the Folk Songs in the Violin and Piano Books of Shinichi Suzuki," *Bulletin of Historical Research in Music Education* 16, no. 3 (May 1995): 177-93. [view reference](#)

- 10) See (Gruhn, 2003, pp. 163-218). [view reference](#)
- 11) Kestin Wartberg, telephone interview, 1 July 2008. [view reference](#)
- 12) (Suzuki, 1983, pp. 76-77); similar in (Suzuki, 1985a). [view reference](#)
- 13) Leonor Micaelis to Albert Einstein, 25 January 1927 (Einstein Archives, no. 47 - 618.00; microfilm copy: Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton). The Suzuki Violins website includes a letter by Einstein to Suzuki Masakichi thanking him and praising the violins <http://www.suzukiviolin.co.jp/about/story3.html>. Einstein mentions two sons of Masakichi, probably Shin'ichi and Umeo. [view reference](#)
- 14) Einstein visited Nagoya from 7 to 9 December; (Sugimoto, 2005, p. 286). [view reference](#)
- 15) On Einstein and music: (Rentsch & Gerhard, 2006);(Botstein, 2008); (Bucky, 1992, pp. 147-156; Wolff, 2005). [view reference](#)
- 16) Piano teachers began to apply Suzuki's principles to the piano from the formative years, well before the publication of printed material in the 1960s (Landers, 1995 (1980), pp. 25-26). [view reference](#)
- 17) [www.saito-kinen.com/e/about\\_skf/saito.shtml](http://www.saito-kinen.com/e/about_skf/saito.shtml). [view reference](#)
- 18) One author even speaks of a "classical music complex": (Aikawa, 2002). [view reference](#)
- 19) Not to mention the American tours where only about ten children from among the thousands of Suzuki students would be selected. [view reference](#)
- 20) Tove Detreköy also observed that for many Japanese learning Suzuki violin is mainly seen as a temporary drill. [view reference](#)
- 21) Examples: Kuronuma Yuriko (b. 1940), Tanaka Toshiko (b. 1940), Wanami Takayoshi and Temma Atsuko (b. 1955). [view reference](#)
- 22) On tensions between Japan and Europe in the 1960s and '70s: (Wilkinson, 1983, pp. 68-77). [view reference](#)
- 23) Examples of reporting: (Parmenter, 1964a, 1964b; Strongin, 1964a, 1964b). [view reference](#)
- 24) The German version of Nurtured by Love only appeared in 1975. [view reference](#)
- 25) Cited in (Verband deutscher Musikschulen, n.d.; 1981?). [view reference](#)
- 26) To emphasize the similarity to existing practices, the report quotes the passage from Fink



quoted above: (Verband deutscher Musikschulen, n.d.; 1981?)p. 92. [view reference](#)

27) Kerstin Wartberg, the director of the German Suzuki Institute, believes it was; telephone interview, 1 July 2008. [view reference](#)

28) E-mail communication from from Gisbert Möller, VdM, 28 August 2008. [view reference](#)

29) E-mail communication from Kerstin Wartberg, 13 February 2009. [view reference](#)

30) <http://europeansuzuki.org/about.htm> ; (Beyer, 2002, pp. 18-19). [view reference](#)

31) <http://www.klingler-stiftung.de/marklingl.php>. [view reference](#)

32) Belgium, Great Britain, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Faroe Islands, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, South Africa, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. [view reference](#)

33) E-mail communication from Kerstin Wartbert, 13 February 2009. [view reference](#)

34) Telephone interviews with Kerstin Wartberg, 1 and 7 July 2008. [view reference](#)

35) Interview 1 July 2008. [view reference](#)

36) <http://www.hofer-symphoniker.de/146.o.html>. [view reference](#)

37) Interview, 7 July 2008. [view reference](#)

38) See the ISA webpage: [http://www.internationalsuzuki.org/instrument\\_committees.htm](http://www.internationalsuzuki.org/instrument_committees.htm)  
Alfred Publishing issues an entire catalogue of Suzuki materials:  
[http://www.alfred.com/img/pdf/BOP/2008\\_Alfred\\_Suzuki\\_Catalog.pdf](http://www.alfred.com/img/pdf/BOP/2008_Alfred_Suzuki_Catalog.pdf). [view reference](#)

39) <http://www.germansuzuki.de/index.php?page=abouttheauthorde&&sprache=de>. [view reference](#)

40) A search for “Suzuki Shin’ichi” in the Zen-On online shop produces only 34 items; the basic tutors for violin, flute and cello and some supplementary pieces; “Suzuki Method” produces only 18 items. [www.zen-on.co.jp](http://www.zen-on.co.jp) (accessed 26 January 2009). Mr. Matsushita Kazuhiro of Zen-On’s publishing department confirmed in an email communication (7 May 2009) that Zen-on does not issue other materials. [view reference](#)

41) [http://www.internationalsuzuki.org/regional\\_associations.htm](http://www.internationalsuzuki.org/regional_associations.htm). [view reference](#)

42) Interview Tove Detreköy 28 May 2008. [view reference](#)

43) In Japanese senshū gakkō and senmon gakkō. [view reference](#)

44) [http://www.suzukimethod.or.jp/english/E\\_mthd41.html](http://www.suzukimethod.or.jp/english/E_mthd41.html) ;  
<http://www.suzukimethod.or.jp/02/tra.html> (Japanese). [view reference](#)

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