

## How CML changed my life

I think, I can summarize my training as a Suzuki Violin and Viola Teacher (from 2008-2013), as *an real enrichment of my life as a teacher*. It was also an enrichment of my personal development and of my own learning abilities during these years! Most challenging was, to play all the pieces, (10 books!), by heart. But I succeeded and through the years of the teacher training program I gathered a lot of very useful teaching tools and effective learning tools, which I do share with joy with my young and old students (from age 3- age 65).

Nevertheless, working with the Suzuki method, I discovered some weaknesses and musical and pedagogical elements that in my opinion lacked. But none of my teacher trainers I had -- Johannes Lievaart (Level 1), Kathrin Averdung (Level 2, 3, 4), Jan Matthiesen (Level 5) and Ilona Telmanyi (Viola level 1+2) -- could provide real satisfying solutions or fill up these 'gaps'.

What did I miss in Suzuki method?

- 1) Singing, singing, singing!
- 2) Awareness of the body and the capacity to move freely on the stage
- 3) Ensemble playing from the scratch: 2nd voices
- 4) Canons
- 5) Music Theory and music reading at an early age

But I also knew, there was a solution and I would not have to invent 'the wheel' myself. Since I met Ines Armanino end of 2008, I was aware of the fact, there did exist a whole teaching program, called 'Ritmica' that seemed able to answer my questions, support my needs and provide repertoire and materials for the elements I wanted to add to the 'traditional' Suzuki program. Ines presented songs and exercises of this mysterious 'Ritmica'-program at a Suzuki conference in Remscheid (Germany) and I was triggered. I had to know more about it!

I had a closer look on internet and found the website [www.musicalgarden.it](http://www.musicalgarden.it), saw the recordings and the pictures of Elena Enrico. Now I was excited: I saw children dancing around a tree on the melody of *Allegretto*, other children moving around in a circle and swinging their arms together on a non-Suzuki song, boys and girls building a tower of 3 wooden cubes while singing arpeggios, a teacher using balloons during the lesson, 6 year olds conducting while reading a score and children playing on little pianos during a theory class!!



I did visit Ines Armanino several times, observed her lessons and learned a lot from her. Nevertheless, I had to wait until November 2013 to have the possibility to follow the teacher training program, nowadays called *Children's Music Laboratory* (CML) with Teacher Trainer Marco Messina.<sup>1</sup>

I can only summarize: CML does answers my Suzuki questions, fills up the 'gaps' and last but not least it stimulates my fantasy and teaching creativity in the most joyful way! CML makes the Suzuki method for me complete!

I would like to spend some words on each topic out of the little list mentioned above:

### 1) **Singing, singing, singing.** Your first instrument is your voice and how the CML program can help with this.

When I started my Suzuki Violin Training program in 2008 in the Netherlands, I had to observe for several months all kinds of pre-twinkle-, twinkle-, reading- and clapping-classes and also advanced students lessons and concerts of Teacher Trainer Johannes Lievaart. One of my biggest questions was, why Johannes did not (more often) sing with his students. I mentioned that intonation, feeling for phrasing, breathing, rhythm etc. could really benefit from singing and that the voice is actually everybody's first 'instrument'.

Johannes' short answer was that Suzuki method as it was presented by his classes was perfect and kind of the only way to learn to play well. And by the way, he didn't sing, because his voice was not that beautiful: 'Me, an old man singing, would not be very attractive. Also that low voice would not fit to the high children's voices'. 'Aha'!

What a disappointment: no answer to my question, no possibility to add something, no possibility to develop (alone or together). It was not the first time, I dared to ask a serious question, that was waved away with a, let's say 'not very reasonable answer', 'Suzuki method as it is, is perfect' / 'Suzuki did not sing himself' or something like that.

But I have to confess: I absolutely understand his shyness to sing in a group with children (and in Suzuki lessons even parents are sitting around and listening!). Yes: We Suzuki teachers are in the spotlight during our lessons: every movement is followed by several observers. And if you are not used to sing alone or with children, it can really be an uncomfortable situation. You have to express yourself through your voice, with your body, without possibility to hide 'behind' an instrument. But I think, that is no valid reason, to 'delete' this so important topic in the learning process from the so well developed Suzuki program!

But why did I actually ask about this topic, 'singing'? Because I did clearly remember, that I myself did not sing much when I learned to play recorder and violin (from age 7 on): nobody did ask or stimulate it, not at home, not during violin lessons. For sure on a certain age, I did absolutely avoid to sing! What an awful moment, when my teacher

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<sup>1</sup> To be honest: I'm absolutely not happy with the name Children's Music Laboratory. The word 'Laboratory' makes me expect experiments, scientific coldness etc. In reality the program is full of joy and happiness!



asked me: 'Please sing the D and than the F: what interval is that?'. My head only turned red and no tone came out!

So the first bunch of reasons for me to sing with my own students is, what I already mentioned above: intonation, feeling of phrasing, breathing, rhythms etc. All these things do really benefit from singing. I have to add memory training.

The other reason for me is more in the field of the philosophy: I really want to make my students 'complete human beings and musicians', not just persons who can reproduce music (or just a melody) by touching the strings of a violin with the fingers of the left hand and moving a bow with the right hand. I would like to say: "Who 'dares' to sing and put emotions in it, will also be more expressive while playing violin".

During the years of my Suzuki training, I did observe a lot of very experienced and dedicated Suzuki teachers, but just a few of them did sing really on a regular and consequent base with their students. Impressive was Mickey Zirnbauer (Cologne), who did sing the repertoire songs of book 1 (and also scales) with the students like they were, starting at the A-string and of course having difficulties to reach the high notes like the high A. But she was not ashamed to squeak sometimes: 'I'm not a singer, but I do my best, singing is important for the inner ear!'

Something else: I remember the footage of a small Japanese boy, cycling outdoor at the playground with his three-wheeled bicycle, having a tape recorder on his back, to hear the music of the Suzuki CD on regular base: 'listen to your CD every day', is always said. This is of course a very important thing to do, Suzuki was absolutely right, he stressed the fact of 'knowing' the songs before you will play them, but that 'daily listening to the CD' is only 'passive' knowledge. Really 'doing' something with the song, is ten times more effective! Imagine how much more learning effect you would have, when the children do sing the songs, move around, remember a text and choreography, so really 'do' something with the music, instead of just 'listen daily to the Suzuki CD'. That is what the CML program does with the songs: make them part of your daily life! Singing is feeling the music in your own body, through your body. In CML we do sing a lot: to train the voice, the inner ear, the memory by having texts for all repertoire songs and also for the 'songs-to-make' (extra songs that train manuality), we do sing scales, arpeggios and even cadenzas and intervals! A lot more singing than I ever had imagined to do with my students! Thanks for these bright ideas!

## 2) Awareness of the body and the capacity to move freely on the stage

As I mentioned, in the CML program we do sing repertoire songs with texts... but we do also perform with every song a special choreography. Sometimes we move with big movements like in one of the first 'Songs to make' *My hands up, my hands down* (to make clear the concept of up and down, left and right, clapping while counting etc.) or fine motoric skills in songs like "The shell" where we need exact tapping movements of separate fingers. We perform choreographies not only to the Suzuki-repertoire songs (of several instruments), also to motoric skills songs (Songs to make) and music theory



songs: to scales, arpeggios, cadenzas, intervals. The choreographies help to memorize and recognize the structure of the songs, they train at the same time our manuality, our rhythm skills, our working together and the movements through the room on the beat of the music, and we train to follow a leader and really move together and act as one musical body.

So actually without noticing it, we all (teachers, children and parents) are moving musically (together and separately) through the room, enjoying to move and react on each other and presenting ourselves without the feeling to be in the spotlight, because we all do join and are together one. Not the one that moves is seen, the ones who do not move will be seen: joining is more safe than not joining! So with this topic another topic of my needs is served: 'Dare to move': use your body movement for musical expression! Dare to present yourself on stage!

This singing, texting and moving brings me to another point of the CML program, which is, I think, extremely useful and shows again, that the learning and performing capacities of children (parents and teachers!!!) are even bigger than 'singing a song' and 'remembering the choreography fitting to this song', if we trust 'they can': the use of second voices!

### **3) Ensemble playing from the scratch: Second voices.**

What did I observe in Suzuki method lessons throughout Europe and also around the world: children do play a song individual on an instrument, they play the song in group lessons all together, they do very nice games with the song or elements of the song to improve together certain teaching points in a joyful way and then they play it all together at a concert with the accompaniment of a piano (piano well tuned or out of tune, but anyway the piano is added!). That's looks like a nice concept. But I did miss something: why was this no music making for me? Why was it only the piano, that added the accompaniment? If children are able to play (even difficult) songs and music pieces, wouldn't they be able to play themselves the accompaniment, split up in second and even third voices? Why did Suzuki teachers not more often play string ensemble? If you would work out 1st and 2nd voice with everybody and then split up the parts, everybody would be more awake and alert while playing the piece in ensemble because you have to react on each other (for example play a half note long enough, because you know in second voice it's filled up with eight notes). So I decided to play myself a second voice (on the violin) with my students on a certain and quite early moment: as soon as they manage to play something good without my or mams help (even when they only manage to play the first line of Twinkle, I add the second voice). It's nice because it sounds nice, but also because they learn not to be distracted by my sound and movements and string players intonation will improve more then with the accompaniment of a piano (that is for strings always not exactly in tune). Nowadays I start even teaching the children and parents the second voice on the violin depending on the 'strength of the child' already after the first 3 or 4 Suzuki songs they play on the violin.



And again in the CML concept I did find confirmation of this thought. Of course Elena Enrico added even a lot more things than I ever thought about. In CML we do use second voices a lot earlier than I did until now, even with children that don't play the violin yet (or one of the other Suzuki instruments). All sing (!) first and second voices (not only play at their instruments).

But be aware: with the second voice of the CML program, you do also perform a (slightly) different text and choreography. And the voices are sung and performed with the two different choreographies all together! So you do actually also SEE the two voices with your eyes!

To 9 songs (from Suzuki books of all kinds of instruments) Elena Enrico composed a second voice and a second choreography:

1. Twinkle, twinkle, little star
2. French Folksong
3. Lightly row
4. Song of the Wind
5. Aunt Rhody
6. May song
7. Allegro
8. Allegretto
9. Wiegenlied of Brahms

I now use Elena Enrico's second voices for these 9 pieces. For the other pieces I do introduce in violin class as soon as possible the second and third voices of Suzuki violin repertoire with Kerstin Wartberg's *Trio book*.

#### 4) Canons

Of course with playing two voices you actually have to prepare two different songs to be able to play it polyphonic. So I started already a long time ago to use also canons in my lessons: everybody learns the same song, you don't have to learn second (and third voices) to play with several voices! As soon as students can play the song properly, you can play it in canon and have a wonderful polyphonic performance.

I always wondered why Suzuki did not use Canons in the repertoire books. There are so many nice canons, reaching from very simple to extremely complicated. And one very important point is; what a joy and variety instead of always hearing the same Suzuki pieces with all playing on melody with accompaniment of a piano. And intonation is automatically a topic while practicing a canon. Canons would actually be 'the perfect Suzuki-play-together' possibility.

Again confirmation of my thoughts during the CML training course: Elena Enrico did also add canons to the program of CML, so my needs were again perfectly supported. Brilliant addition: we do sing canons in canon a long time before we play them in canon on the instrument. Most striking effect of the CML approach (like using two voices): the movements! So you not only HEAR the canon, you can SEE it also!!



## 5) Music theory also from the start

When I learnt to play violin, my own violin teacher did postpone scales and music theory for a long period and said when we started it: “now for something completely different and difficult: music theory. I’m not good in it, and I don’t like it much, but everyone who plays an instrument should know also about music theory. And if you want to do the music school examinations, one part of the examination is always music theory, so let’s start with that now”.

With this comment a big fear was born also in me: “theory... argghhhh... difficult!... panic!”. I had to read a dry book and learn the intervals and even know about ‘lydisch, frygisch, mixolydisch’ etc. But I even didn’t grasp the full structure of the principle of major and minor scales...

The dots of notes in my violin book represented for me a long time just that one finger on that string, not Do or Re or Mi, and also not C and D and E. (I didn’t dare to ask for explanations, so avoided the theme and was just afraid, someone could ask me).

What do we always say during Suzuki speeches with parents: ‘Learning abilities of children are immense’? So Elena Enrico did not hesitate to add also skills in music theory. Scales, arpeggios and cadenzas are not too difficult, if introduced carefully! Also note reading, solfeggio exercises and note drawing is part of the program. And there is some good news about it: children and parents love it!

With songs like the ‘Dive’ (the song with sungen scale and later extended in several steps with sungen arpeggio, cadenza and intervals), the theory program of the CML-curriculum is actually already starting with the pre-twinklers and very small children that do not play an instrument yet. They don’t work with the notes yet at the beginning, they ‘only’ sing and perform the dive, but the already internalise with this the concept of the phenomenon scale, arpeggio, cadenza etc. The whole CML program is set up for plus minus six years of lessons, so it accompanies the children also, while they learn to play violin or one of the other Suzuki instruments. After having sung all the tonalities, they also learn how the scale, arpeggio, cadenza looks on the paper and after that they will play it also on the piano.

If we believe, the children are able to do or learn a certain thing, and we do (like always) divide the task in smallest possible learning steps... they will be able do it and they will love it! My students love to sing scales with right note names (including the sharps and flats), read music from Joan Martins book ‘I can read music’ and sing them with the right intonation.

I think it’s of great importance to make the students understand, what they are doing:  
- They should be able to listen, imitate and copy what the teacher is doing, but I think, they should also be able to discover pieces they never did hear before.  
-They should also be able, to write down, what they are playing. So Musical dictation is also an important element to train, from the start of there musical learning process.

The CML program provides a lot of exercises and games in this field, and again a lot more than I ever could imagine!



## 6) Extra achievements during my training as Suzuki teacher and CML teacher

### My learning process: the pieces in the Suzuki Repertoire are learning material not the 'holy grale' .

It took me quite a while, to see the use and the 'fun' of it. I just complained a long time: "What do they do in Suzuki method with my beloved Baroque pieces?" How dare they, to use this awful romantic bowings, huge bow strokes, romantic accompaniments etc.

What a struggle I had to go through: I was (and am) an 'authentic baroque player' and had to play the Baroque pieces during the Suzuki training in a completely different way.

And even some of the (mostly German) folk songs of book 1 were somehow changed and adapted by Suzuki.

Poor teachers trainers: I kept asking and they had to bring up good arguments, why that way of playing was necessary. They could not convince me: "WE do it like this, like Suzuki thought, and it sounds also good, isn't it?" My baroque-sensitivity was attacked and my heart did bleed. I HAD to do it like they wanted: end of the story. And I stopped asking.

Then someone said something important during a conference: Suzuki himself used the scores available in his time, he didn't have Urtext editions... and the whole 'authentic' baroque music scene was not developed like nowadays, it was even not born, when Suzuki choose the pieces for the repertoire. He did not know better!<sup>2</sup>

My Teacher Trainer for the 5th violin level Jan Matthiesen from Denmark could bring this topic with humour: 'Eccles did not live 1670-1742 but at the beginning of the 20th century'! Thanks a lot! I can really live with that approach! As long as we don't say 'this IS the way we should play it, because Suzuki said it', I really can enjoy the pieces in romantic style too!

So what means this: In Suzuki method, we don't see the music pieces as 'holy'. We do have a didactical goal with the pieces, train certain technique skills with them, so sometimes pieces are somehow 'attacked' and transformed to reach our goals.

If you accept this, doors are open: it is great to discover, that you can do wonderful things with the pieces if you allow to mutate them. Which brings us to the following point: also the songs of Suzuki himself are teaching material (there is not THE one way to play *Etude* or *Allegretto*): please USE those pieces, transform them to reach your didactical goals!

This is also what Elena Enrico shows in her arrangements: creativity. So you can also have fun playing *Allegro* like a pop song and it's sounds great. She and with her Marco Messina stimulates us, to be creative with the teaching material Suzuki provided to us. So if we want another text for a song, we are free to use that and to invent a new choreography: as long as we always keep in mind, what is our teaching goal with this

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<sup>2</sup> Which brings me to the question: Don't WE do know nowadays better? Shouldn't we teach also, that there is a way of romantic playing (take romantic pieces for that) and there is a way you play baroque pieces (of course you can play on a modern violin with steel strings and a modern bow, more baroque like, you don't have to have the baroque equipment). If you play fiddle music, you use also fiddle style, if you want to play Grapelli, you have to have other skills, and if you want to play tango argentino music, you will discover again other elements and necessary 'tricks' to let it sound like 'tango'. Several types of music need several kinds of playing style, I think, not play everything in one manner, that will kill the variety.



change. What can we train with this certain movement and text. Does it all fit logically together? Then we do have unlimited possibilities!

I'm happy with my academic brain, but I'm also happy with my newly achieved children's brain, music brain, joke brain, exercise brain, game brain, dancing and singing brain.

I do really love to be a Suzuki teacher and a CML teacher: I will continue learning and receiving from others. And as a result of this, I will give it to my students, who want to learn and receive... and share it with others: panta rhei. My sensibility and creativity did grow: on a musical plan but also in general and the human plan!

