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# The Music Academy

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815.986.0037 · www.MusicAcademyInRockford.com



## Spring Newsletter 2021

### Advice to Parents in a Pandemic

“If you had to give advice to your students’ parents this year, what would you tell them?” asked Nancy Hair (from Boston, MA and cello pedagogue at the New England Conservatory Preparatory Division and Hartt School of Music) of her colleagues across Facebook’s terrain.

- ◆ Be a part of the process and support your child’s musical journey.
- ◆ You only GET to practice in your child’s life ONCE. Every moment may become a memory for either one of you.
- ◆ Put the child’s heart before the skill being practiced.
- ◆ Lie on the floor with them should/when they have a melt down.
- ◆ Remember: character first, ability second.
- ◆ Really, that it is not fun all the time, is ok.
- ◆ Cheerlead for your child, just as you did when they took their first steps.
- ◆ What we think of as side effects of musical training (a bigger heart, a better brain, etc., etc.) are more important than being the best player on the block.
- ◆ Music has the power to nurture the soul...so important in these times...it can be a way to take away the stress and to heal.



“Believe in your own ability to help your children.” Dr. Shinichi Suzuki

### Teaching with Kirk’s Creativity and Spock’s Logic - Empower learning, unleash ability and inspire creativity!



The Music Academy successfully applied for a grant from the Rockford Area Arts Council to support a professional development opportunity for music teachers – our own and others in the community. Lyda Osinga, a master teacher with National Board Certification joined us on January 16 for a day of professional development via Zoom. We learned about her Decoder Academy, which helps students to partner with composers (Bach to Beyoncé!) Students can be transformed when they can look at music through a composer’s mindset. Our goal is to help all students develop a life-long love of music. Decoders

provide a consistent framework for students to easily understand composers’ mindset by learning why does their music exist, how it is put together, and what is the composer saying. Not all of our students come to us with similar backgrounds. We need to open the doors to all and learn how to help them, their parents and teachers make this possible.

Many thanks to the Rockford Area Arts Council for helping us to make music come alive in our community and for helping us to reach out to other music teachers by inviting their involvement in this day of learning together.

*This program is partially supported by a grant from the Rockford Area Arts Council which receives support from the City of Rockford, the Illinois Arts Council Agency and its members*

“I am seeking. I am striving. I am in it with all my heart.” Vincent van Gogh



### Because life without music isn't...

#### An Endowment Campaign for the Future of The Music Academy

It is the vision of The Music Academy Foundation, the friend and fund raising arm of The Music Academy, to provide student scholarship, financial aid and funds for the continuing professional development of the artist faculty and to ensure that we offer rich, essential life experience as a part of the music education offered at The Music Academy in Rockford.

Since 1985, The Music Academy has been in concert with our community. In music, everyone is free, everyone is equal, and everyone is fulfilling the greatest potential of being human. No matter what happens in the coming weeks and months, let us not lose our belief in the power and necessity of music. Our students have a remarkable track record of becoming amazing musicians and citizens. Their sphere of influence is global. We still have miles to go. Your investment in our endowment fund takes us one-step closer to building the links between past, current and future generations.

Please contact our executive director, Marti Frantz, with any questions you may have about the Foundation or our endowment, 815-986-0037.

Your endowment gift to ensure the future of The Music Academy is essential.

Stephen Hoffman, Chair

The Music Academy Foundation

Barbara Huffman, Endowment Chair

The Music Academy Foundation

**“Music school is where children learn so much more than just to play the notes; they learn to be human together.”** Pat Michelsen, donor to the silent phase of The Music Academy Foundation Endowment Campaign and a parent of three alums of The Music Academy.

**“It takes a noble person to plant a seed for a tree that will one day provide shade to those he never met.”** Dr. Elton Trueblood

### Congratulations

#### Saristhi

Saristhi is the first student to complete our Winter Practice Challenge!

When you practice, color in a snowflake. Get all 1000 done and turn into the office for a free scoop from Culver’s.

Forms are on the front desk.



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## LIGHTING THE WAY

### An Interview with Composer Joel Thompson

Excerpted Interview by Nina Gross, American Suzuki Journal.

Gross is violin, viola and composition faculty member at the Prindle School, MA.

Gross - Some people would say that the world of classical music is not open to people of color, not welcoming, or not part of the Black experience.

Joel Thompson, Emmy award-winning composer and pianist, conductor, and educator from Atlanta responds to the above observation by Gross, saying, "I know that more practical work needs to be done to expand our audience and that comes



down to music education and access to these performances. I know that music education – access to instruments, access to lessons – these are practical things that can change the landscape of classical music. We can change what classical music audiences look like now and expand the scope of this art form that we claim is universal."

Gross: Do you have advice to the parents of young Black or Brown children who might be reading this? And, more universally to parents in general?

Thompson: I think parent and students should focus on the curriculum at hand, focus on doing the best you can with whatever you are given. Still look for the capital - T truth that is embedded in every music that you engage with. Think outside of whatever you are presented. So, your Clementi Sonatinas or whatever – focus on making them as amazing as you possibly can. Bring who you are to the table. Express yourself through it. Even if your performance may not be historically accurate, still allow yourself room for that amount of experimentation. The journey with music is a journey of self-discovery, a way to learn about yourself. Sometimes music can be presented in a dogmatic way – just follow the rules. Ask, "Why should I do it this way?" Many times you will find that the answers are correct – you should start your Baroque trills from the top – and you should not go around breaking all the rules. Still, ask "why?" And, if it is not satisfactory to you, find your own ways of expression. Parents should encourage kids to make up music. And, if they bring a tune to you, lift them up. Encourage them. I was encouraged, it led me to stick to this journey of self-expression, and I am so grateful for it.

Gross: What gave you the courage to pursue what some might call a soft field? Were you encouraged by your family? And have your feelings about music as a profession changed over time?

Thompson: The communal aspect was encouraged. I played at church, but it was supposed not to be a profession, rather a side avocation. I also had a passion to be a part of healing in some way. And, so medicine was a logical step and I pursued that in undergrad alongside music. I even took a year off after college to shadow my uncle who was an ob/gyn in Jamaica. I would not say that I gave up medicine for music. I believe that I am practicing another medicine on a different scale, in a different medium. I am still in the business of public health and I think a part of that is addressing the soul and music provides an opportunity for me to do that.

Gross: You have talked about listening. I would like to end with a quote from Shinichi Suzuki and ask you to share your thoughts about what resonates for you: "Listening until we remember is not enough. We must listen until we cannot forget."

Thompson: I think listening is an art to itself. Listening is what separates the amazing artists from the rest. I think I am so attracted to listening as an art form because it is an art form that will save the world. I do hope America is listening to the present moment very, very carefully so that we do not forget. We have so easily forgotten the struggles of the past and we find ourselves in this endless loop of struggle and promise and then entrenchment of the status quo and oppression and the struggle ahead. If we truly listen to this present moment so that we don't forget, I do think that healing is possible.

*American Suzuki Journal Volume 48 #4*

"Listening until we remember is not enough.  
We must listen until we cannot forget."

*Shinichi Suzuki*



## THE MUSIC ACADEMY TRIFECTA: Excellence, Access and Affordability



The Music Academy is leading the way in doing exactly what Joel Thompson believes. Our focus must remain three fold – striving for excellence as well as access and affordability. To not focus on all three is devastating to diversity, inclusion and equity efforts and to making music the truly universal language we say it is. To not focus on all three is undermining to the future of classical music. To not focus on all three simultaneously and vigorously would mean that we have not listened to the current anger and anguish of the moment. In devoting ourselves to the three points of focus, we find meaningful and impactful ways to navigate the space in which classical music exists.

Internalizing the rules of classical music is important. The rules help us to find ways to connect different types of music to the same musical concepts and encourage amateur musicians to engage in whatever way they see fit, but also to know that there is a treasure trove of knowledge and trust and wisdom and they can have access to it. Our students come from all kinds of backgrounds and many have no knowledge of classical music. We must let them in the door and allow them to experience the transcendent experience that you can have with classical music. We need to listen to them and allow them learn how Gregorian chant can be paired with R&B, and how the melismatic runs in Baroque opera are much the same as those sung by Beyoncé, Mariah Carey and No Name so that they understand that music is music.

We must continue to give our students room to grow, stretch, and learn to listen, to be as amazing as they possibly can and to learn, though the study of music, as much as they can about themselves and the world. The Music Academy sits at the epicenter of an arts education that offers very high quality while providing for access and affordability. Moreover, that is the path forward to ensure beautiful, competent citizens who listen to, respect one another, and have the capacity to heal one another through music.

We need to listen to the current moment very carefully so that we do not forget. Healing is possible if we really "listen to the moment enough so that we cannot forget."

## SAY "YES" TO MUSIC EDUCATION AND LET THE MAGIC BEGIN!

I recently had the pleasure of speaking with a mother who is considering embracing the philosophy and methodology of Suzuki instruction for her and her child. She observed that her four-year-old son "loves music" and she seems extraordinarily responsive to it. She also described him as a very busy child who has a short attention span; that he is bright, inquisitive, and very social. In considering a program of music education, she reflected about his need for positive, engaging role models in both peers and teachers. She wants him to continue to enjoy music. Choosing the right instrument is of concern to her. She asked if I could determine if he had "talent." She wanted to know what the return on her investment might be. It truly was a pleasure to speak with the Mom who is passionately considering how she wants to engage in her son's education.

She asked great questions! I hope my responses might be useful and reassuring to you no matter where you are on your music education journey!

First, let me assure everyone that "talent" is a mythical concept. There is no such magical gift as talent. What can be observed is the expression of ability or potential that has been cultivated through discipline, drive and daily practice. **This is the magic formula.** The job of The Music Academy is to articulate this formula in our educational philosophy and methodology while helping parents and students understand and take the steps that lead to success – or to ability realized.



Second, we are all born with an innate ability to learn to speak our native languages and to make music. Everyone single one of us has potential. However, ability does not develop spontaneously. The development of musical ability is inspired and stimulated by being placed in a musical environment, and within a musical community that shares this uniquely human ability to make music. **This is the magic wand.** Repeatedly play recordings of the music your child will be learning. Make it a part of their environment at home and in the car. Have them "listen until they cannot forget." Students learn to love that with which they are familiar and feel they can accomplish. Bring them to The Music Academy in order to make the noisy, vibrant, and intelligent community of music makers here at the school a regular part of the child's learning environment.

Finally, understand that ability and mastery of the underlying skill sets leading to ability are transferable skills. **This is the return on investment.** Music Academy students are good students! They do very well academically because of the habits they have cultivated. They learn how to learn and they transfer skills to other subjects. They learn to take pleasure in their accomplishments. They learn to listen and they learn to play well with others. They come to appreciate something of beauty, something beyond

just mastery of the facts. Many our students have discovered that music can lead to healing; sharing their music involves them in public healing.

New students want that feeling to continue and a choosing career in the sciences and medicine allows them to continue to be involved in public healing. They come to appreciate something of beauty, something beyond just mastery of the facts. They are provided with a sense of awe and hope and they are invigorated intellectually and emotionally. This is what we really are all about at The Music Academy!

So, "YES, Mom!" Choose to involve and invest in a structured music education. Your four year old will soon become more focused regardless of the instrument you choose for him to play. The benefits are life-long. Invest in this rich educational journey with your son. Participate with him in relishing this simple celebration of what it means to be human. Make music education a part of your lives.

**This is the magic!**

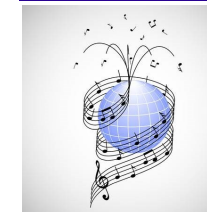
## ABOUT ALUMNI ABBY SULEMAN

Abby Suleman was a violin student at The Music Academy for close to 13 years. She is now captivated by the intersections of birth work, period poverty, and housing and food insecurity. She says she, "...often considers these relations with respect to social determinants, racial and ethnic disparities, the fourth trimester, and their global impacts." She soon finishes her undergraduate work at the University of Illinois, Chicago majoring in Chemistry and French with a minor in social work. She has applied for a Master of Public Health and is working to further use "her experience with the Chicago community to recognize the potential of people who have been overlooked domestically and globally." She is also currently working on becoming a Birth and Bereavement Doula and presently looking for two more births to attend and observe to complete her certification through sistersinlosstraining.thinkfic.com/ Eventually, she will pursue medical school.



I must say, if I were to pick a doula or a doctor who I knew would LISTEN carefully and have true motivation to HEAL, a person who truly has a BEAUTIFUL HEART (the things to which we aspire to at The Music Academy) I would pick Abby – hands down. We have been so fortunate to have her as a student and I know the world will be a better place for her particular stamp on it.

## EVERYONE IN HARMONY



The Music Academy Foundation has formed a committee to educate ourselves and ensure that we are working on diversity, equity and inclusion and making sure we look as much as is possible like our community. We know that we need to have one voice as an organization, staff and board in order to move forward with such a project. The committee currently includes faculty member Rachel Handlin, Foundation Board members Al Mezny and Emily Klonicki and School Board member Chris Wrate.

If you are interested in this initiative, please contact Rachel Handlin, 815-226-8431 or [rhlvlnist@yahoo.com](mailto:rhlvlnist@yahoo.com)

*Counting the wrong beans...*

*Do not wonder at the violinist that plays a thousand songs.*

*Wonder at the one who plays a song a thousand times.*