April 10, 2010
Dear Suzuki Parents:
We hope that you all had a wonderful Spring Break! The weather is beautiful, flowers have bloomed and the grass is green. What more can we ask for? There are many important events coming this next month!

The Suzuki Strings Spring Concert on Thursday, May 6 @ 5:30pm is twice as wonderful because we are celebrating our efforts in reaching our practice goals for the spring term with Pizza, and we will also celebrate the 25th year that Dr. Judy Palac has been involved in the MSU Suzuki Program! In addition to our wonderful concert, we will celebrate with cake, have alumni and parents of alums join us for the festivities! There is the performance at the East Lansing Arts Festival, Saturday, May 15th @ 11am; the Spartan Strings (advanced violinists and violists) will be performing with the Mid-Michigan Youth Symphony twice on Tuesday, April 27 at the East Lansing High School at 7 pm and on Tuesday, May 4th at 10am in the Wharton Center Great Hall. And the Spartan Strings have been asked to premiere a new work written just for them from CMS's resident composer, Marjan Helms on Sunday, May 23rd at 3pm.

Our practice incentive is still running along - hoping to reach our goal of 5,775 days from our entire Suzuki program students! That is about 75 days per student within a 15 week period. Go for it!:-)

Make a habit of frequently check the MSU-CMS Suzuki website; start at www.cms.msu.edu then click on the Suzuki link. There is a link to the Suzuki Calendar as well as the MSU-CMS Suzuki Program Newsletter every two months. I encourage you to read the information, calendar of events and up-coming news to stay well informed. Hard copies of newsletters will be available at private lessons.

Please send any updated e-mail addresses to Sue Garber, Director (garbersu@msu.edu) as soon as possible.

---

**Important Dates**

**April 12-30** -- Donation Drive for Gateway Community Services  Donate household items (see brochures at CMS) and receive a reusable grocery bag

May 1 (Saturday)  Suzuki Piano Program Spring Recital

May 2 (Sunday, 3 pm)  Suzuki Program Book Graduation Recital, Auditorium; rehearsal TBA

May 4 (Tuesday, 10am)  Spartan Virtuosi Strings perform with the Mid-Michigan Youth Symphony at Wharton Center for school children in the morning.

May 6 (Thursday, 5:30pm), Suzuki Strings Spring Concert and Celebration of Dr. Judy Palac's 25th year with the MSU Suzuki Program

May 27 (Thursday, 7:30pm)  Spartan Virtuosi Strings Spring Concert and Ice Cream Social with guests from the Okemos Suzuki Program

May 29 Last day of Spring Semester

June 1  Make-up Week for CMS lessons

June 7  Summer Semester begins at CMS

June 17 - 27  Blue Lake Suzuki Family Camp - Twin Lakes, MI

June 29 - July 1  Grandparents University at MSU

August 16 - 20  Phoenix Suzuki Institute, Ann Arbor

September 7 (Tuesday)  CMS Fall Semester Begins
This is a collection of practice ideas for Suzuki instrumental students.

Good and regular practice is crucial in the Suzuki method, and the more enjoyable the practice is, the more efficient it is and the more it helps the student to thrive and to progress in his studies. All over the world, Suzuki families have been inventing their own private ways and tricks to practice and to keep the daily practice routine interesting. This individual experience and these private collections of practicing ideas would be a tremendous resource — if they would be shared with the whole Suzuki community.

**General practice ideas**

- **Make your child a Popstar** - Every child wants to become famous. Make a CD with her best violin pieces. She can give those CDs away to her friends, and they also make good Christmas presents for your family. This activity not only includes dressing up and posing for photographs, but also designing a CD cover, choosing the right pieces, and carefully brushing those pieces up before you finally record them.

- **Take the index card practice to the next level** - We are living in the 21st Century. Children love the computer. Give the boring old index cards an upgrade and prompt your child's practice not with handwritten notes but with a PowerPoint presentation. Some kids might even want to create their own PowerPoint practice file. (Make sure they include all the exercises they are supposed to do.) This activity might be a bit time consuming, but for children with a technical mind it is irresistible. They can even include sound files, pictures or small videos. (Gasp that opportunity and have them show off their best violin playing, bow hold etc. for the camera or for the sound recorder.)

- **Have a Stuffie Concert** - Especially good for younger students. Announce to the household that you are having a Concert. Call out “Come to the concert!” and have your child collect all the dolls and stuffed animals to be the audience. (Of course, other family members can come too.) Have a “program” made up with the songs that your child (and you) will play - even if there are some repeats. This is naturally the items you want your child to practice, plus anything they love to play. Be an announcer and announce each piece, and have the audience give praise, cheer, etc. (We had a barrel of monkeys, and they always demanded the “Monkey Song” (pre-twinkle song) for an encore!)

- **Review**
  - **Ping Pong Review** - This is a fun practice idea for students who are a bit more advanced and already have more pieces to review than they can keep track of. Purchase a pack of ping pong balls. You need as many balls as you have review pieces. Using a permanent marker, write the names of the review pieces one on every ball. Put the balls in a non-transparent bag (a pillow case does fine). For the practice, let the child randomly pull a ball out of the bag and play the piece. To make sure that every review piece will be played sooner or later, don’t put the used balls back into the bag, but keep them aside until the bag is empty.

- **The Suzuki Medley** - The following activity is good for students who are more advanced and have so many pieces to review that they sometimes forget how a particular piece (that they perhaps haven’t been reviewing for a while) begins. This problem can be fixed by a daily practice that you can call “The Medley”. For the Medley, the child plays Twinkle Theme, but only the first couple of notes. Then follows Lively Row, only the first notes.

**Special practice**

- **Hire a puppet** - Tired of reminding your six-year-old for the gazillionth time that she can use more of her bow than just an inch and that her tone will sound so much better? You need a time out. A teacher assistant or visiting teacher should take over. Hire a puppet or a stuffed animal. Puppets make awesome teacher assistants. They are low-maintenance, they might be more patient and relaxed than you are and kids love them and listen to them. A puppet knows as much about teaching an instrument as you do, and you can introduce him/her to the child as an “expert” for the problem that needs to be tackled (“Meet Professor Long Bow”).

- **Sing the lyrics** - This is a good activity to make younger children familiar with pieces that are about to study. It also can help older students to memorize tricky musical passages. For most of the pieces in Book 1, there can be lyrics found. Get hold of those, wherever you find them. They are not official, and so they tend to disappear. There are often several versions for one piece, so pick the one that you like most. Some lyrics can be found on the Internet:

  - **Piggy back ride** - This is a fun exercise to improve your young child’s left hand position. She can only use her left hand efficiently when the fingers are in a nice position hovering above the strings. The middle sections of her fingers need to be in a horizontal position. You can call it “tables”. To practice this position, you can have your child play an A scale with a Mississippi Hotdog rhythm, and on each finger that she is setting down, you set some sort of a little object, like a cheerio or a button or a little toy like in the picture. The goal is not to let that object fall down while she is playing.

- **Mah Mah Mee Mee singing** - The following exercise is fun and helpful if your child is preparing or struggling with a piece that includes complicated bowing like a number of slurs. Give the violin a rest, grab the sheet music and mark the slurs on the paper. Use one color for down-slurs, and another color for up-slurs. Then sing the piece together. No lyrics needed. The first time, you sing the whole piece, only using the syllable “mah” (“Mah mah mah mah...”). The second time, you do the same thing, but use the syllables “mee mee” for up-slurs (“meh mee mee mah mah mah mah...”). After you mastered this, add the syllables “moo moo” for down-slurs. Repeat this as often as it is fun, and try not to peek in the sheet music anymore. There are countless variations for this activity, all depending on what the difficulty is that you want to tackle. It works for all kinds of difficult bowing. For a lift for example, you can use a clap or yell “hopp!”. For a hooked bowing, you can use other syllables (ask the child for suggestions).

- **Focusing on a difficult musical passage** - Any difficult series of notes should be practiced separately and fully mastered, before the child attempts to play the whole piece. This will help to avoid lots of frustration. There are many ways to focus on a small passage or even on just one measure. You can make a copy of the sheet music, cut the passage out and glue it on a prepared practice sheet that contains a chart with 100 empty cells. Every time when the child plays the passage, she can check one cell.

- **Composer Quiz** - This is an activity for students who are a bit more advanced, but still are working with Book 1 or 2. You can quiz those kids with the names of the composers of pieces that they have recently been studying or that they are about to study. You can even prepare a memory card game where the players have to combine the name of a piece and the name of the composer.

---

**CMS Suzuki Program Policies**

**OUTREACH CONCERTS**: Students are expected to participate in a minimum of two concerts off campus per calendar year. Sign-up sheets will be available at group classes. We hope that all will be able to participate to ensure sufficient participation at each concert. Dress for these concerts will be white shirts and black/dark bottoms, unless you have a green polo shirt with our Suzuki name on it. Please dress in a neat manner, tucking in all shirts as needed. Students should be prepared to participate in the concert they committed to. Should a conflict arise, first attempts to find a substitute, if you are not successful please notify either the director or assistant director.

**CONCERT DRESS**: Concert dress will be worn for all public group concerts unless otherwise agreed upon. Concert dress is a white shirt (tucked in, if applicable) dark slacks or skirt. No jeans. Recitals require the performers to be dressed in appropriate attire, not the concert dress (see above), but no jeans, tennis shoes or t-shirts. These are special events and should be treated as such.