

Suzuki Violin at Pakachoag Music School Growing in Leaps and Bounds

Have you ever wondered how very young children manage to not just hold, but also play the violin?

These little ones are often successful because they are being taught by a Suzuki-trained teacher – a skilled, dedicated instructor who knows exactly how to nurture a very young child, step by step, toward playing and loving their own violin music.

At Pakachoag Music School, long known for its exceptional music education offerings, Suzuki Violin is among the School's most rapidly growing programs.

Here young students create not only a foundation for their future musical paths, but also the footings for discipline, self-respect, and a love of music itself.

“It's exciting to see the enthusiasm of the new students come recital time,” says School Director Sarah Smongeski. “And it's amazing for me, as well as the parents, to hear and see what young children can do – when taught methodically and effectively by experienced teachers. I'm actually learning about what it means to be a Suzuki family myself as I watch the program unfolding.”

The Suzuki Violin Program at Pakachoag is expanding and now includes:

- Four different levels of Group Classes meeting weekly for children aged 4 through middle school. These classes are offered in addition to the traditional one-on-one weekly private lesson;
- A training course for parents, who are vital participants in the learning process;
- An 8 week music reading class;
- Suzuki teacher training courses for other prospective Suzuki teachers; and
- Roughly 10 different student performance opportunities annually – both formal and informal, on-site and out in the community. Last year, students performed at Mechanics Hall during intermission of the final concert of the Music Worcester concert season. This spring, students visited two nursing homes to share their music with area seniors.



Young Suzuki violin students perform their first group piece for family and friends at a Pakachoag performance class.



Gabe, a fourth-year Suzuki Violin student from Sutton, chats with the elders at a local nursing home following a group performance.

Parents speak enthusiastically about the program. Karonlay Valencia, of Worcester, mom of six-year-old Samuel and nine-year-old Fabian, says, “The Suzuki program is a blessing for my children. We have gone from knowing very little about playing violin, to becoming passionate about it”.

For the Curnen family, of Auburn, now in their sixth year of violin lessons, mom Mary Beth notes, “Some of the gifts we have received from this experience are the triumph of learning a difficult measure, the joy of playing music, the self-confidence gleaned from performance, and the pure fun of friendship.”

In fact, notes Audrey White, one of Pakachoag’s four Suzuki teachers, “Don’t underestimate the value of friendship as a motivator in music. Pakachoag’s strength is partly the benefit of its small, community-based environment, which enables families to develop friendships and allows students to celebrate growth together through school performance programs. The Suzuki program takes that a step further, as tighter relationships develop from the weekly group classes.”



Amy Matherly (right), Suzuki program coordinator and registered Teacher Trainer, leads local violin teachers in a Suzuki Level One training class

Pakachoag’s four Suzuki teachers bring unusual skills and experience to the program.

Amy Matherly, Pakachoag’s Suzuki program coordinator, is a registered Suzuki Teacher Trainer. Only a handful of teachers have achieved this level of training in New England. Amy teaches in the summer at the Colorado Suzuki Institute.

Sheila Reid is well known in the Worcester area for her musical contributions as both a performer and teacher over many decades.

Audrey White completed a component of her Suzuki training in Japan with Dr. Shinichi Suzuki, founder of the Suzuki Method. With the passing of Dr. Suzuki back in 1998 at the age of 100, Audrey is among the last teachers to have studied with the master.

Dr. Leah Zelnick holds a DMA in Violin Performance with an emphasis in Suzuki Pedagogy. She grew up studying at the Preucil School of Music in Iowa City, a school recognized internationally for excellence in Suzuki education.



A young Suzuki student practices her note reading during the six-week Music Reading Class

This summer, for the second year, Pakachoag will offer its very successful “Suzuki Quick Start” summer program, which provides a six-week introduction to the Suzuki approach.

“The Suzuki Quick Start Program is a great way for students to sample what it’s like to take violin lessons,” notes Program Coordinator Amy Matherly. “Parents have the opportunity to learn about the method and the commitment involved. At the end of the six weeks they have the information they need to decide if they want to join the more intense school-year program.”

Pakachoag Director Smongeski is excited about the growth of the program, which this year included an expanded group class offerings, parent education, musical/social gatherings, and regular parent e-newsletters.

“Amy has brought us something very wonderful,” says Smongeski. “Her love of the violin and commitment to the Suzuki Method is clearly apparent – you see it in the excellence the students are achieving, the enthusiasm of their families in making this a priority for their child, and in the collegiality shared among the Suzuki team of teachers. Suzuki at Pakachoag is clearly a big part of our future and reinforces the Pakachoag reputation for setting high standards while supporting students in achieving those standards.”