

INTERMISSIONS

MARCH - APRIL

2008

FEATURED INTERVIEW: LOUISE BEHREND

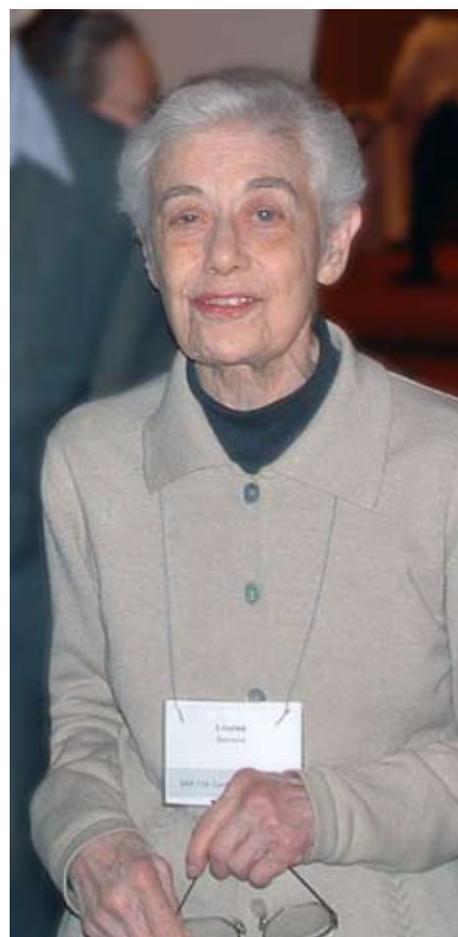
Founder & Director of The School for Strings and Violin Faculty at The Juilliard School

Louise Behrend, one of the world's foremost experts in the Suzuki Method, organized the School for Strings as one of the first schools on the east coast based entirely in the Suzuki Method, and which was originally organized as a teacher-training program. A native of Washington, DC, Louise Behrend studied initially with Herman Rakeman for a number of years, and then studied with Theodor Müller at the Mozarteum International Summer Academy in Salzburg, Austria. Soon after, she became a violin student of Louis Persinger, the renowned teacher of Yehudi Menuhin and Ruggiero Ricci, first privately, then at the Juilliard Graduate School. She performed a number of concerts in the US, including her New York debut at Town Hall, and joined the faculty at The Juilliard School in 1943. After attending a concert by Shinichi Suzuki's young pupils held at Juilliard, she arranged to spend two weeks observing and studying with Dr. Suzuki while on a concert tour of the Far East. On her return to the US, she then began teaching the Suzuki Method, which led to the founding of the School for Strings. Miss Behrend is the author of The Suzuki Approach (published by Summy-Birchard), and has been very active in the Suzuki Association of the Americas, serving for four years as Violin Editor of the American Suzuki Journal, and serving on the committee responsible for revising the Suzuki

violin curriculum. A recipient of the Ysaye Medal, she has received distinguished service awards from both the American String Teachers Association and the Suzuki Association of the Americas. Currently, Miss Behrend continues to teach at both Juilliard and at the School for Strings, where she is in charge of the Suzuki Teacher-Training Violin Seminar. She recently spoke with INTERMISSIONS.

INTERMISSIONS: How did you begin to study the violin?

LOUISE BEHREND: You know this was a weird business because I started asking for the violin at age three. I must have heard recordings of the violin and liked that sound, because we had loads of records in the house. There was always music around the house. My father was a doctor who played the piano and my older sister studied piano, and I for some strange reason have always wanted to play the violin. Interestingly enough, there was a violin teacher, Herman Rakeman, who lived on our street a few houses away, and he said that even as a very young child, I would keep coming around and asking for lessons. He kept refusing to accept me as a pupil until I hit the age of ten. Then, he finally accepted me as a student. Initially, he wanted me to take piano lessons for a year in order to learn to read music, but he didn't



“I HEARTILY RECOMMEND STEVEN PALINCSAR AS A WELL-QUALIFIED AND SUCCESSFUL VIOLIN TEACHER.”

– LOUISE BEHREND

FEATURED INTERVIEW: LOUISE BEHREND *continued from page 1*



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Louise Behrend works with a young Suzuki violin student.

know that I could already read music. You see I learned it in school.

INTERMISSIONS: In school?

LB: Yes, you see the school that I attended was run by two sisters from Geneva, Switzerland, and they had introduced Dalcroze into their school, and you could take Dalcroze in place of Gym for example. So you learn to read music in Dalcroze. The school was a French school—everything there was taught in French. There was only one hour a day of English instruction. Later, I also had to attend public high school, which had only one nice feature, and that was the orchestra. So I even got to study chamber music there—in a public high school.

INTERMISSIONS: So finally you began to study the violin?

LB: Yes, with Herman Rakeman, who lived down the block. He was one of the people who had helped to found the National Symphony Orchestra under Hans Kindler. He had studied in Germany with some very well-known teachers. Although he was born here in the US.

INTERMISSIONS: What kind of a teacher was he?

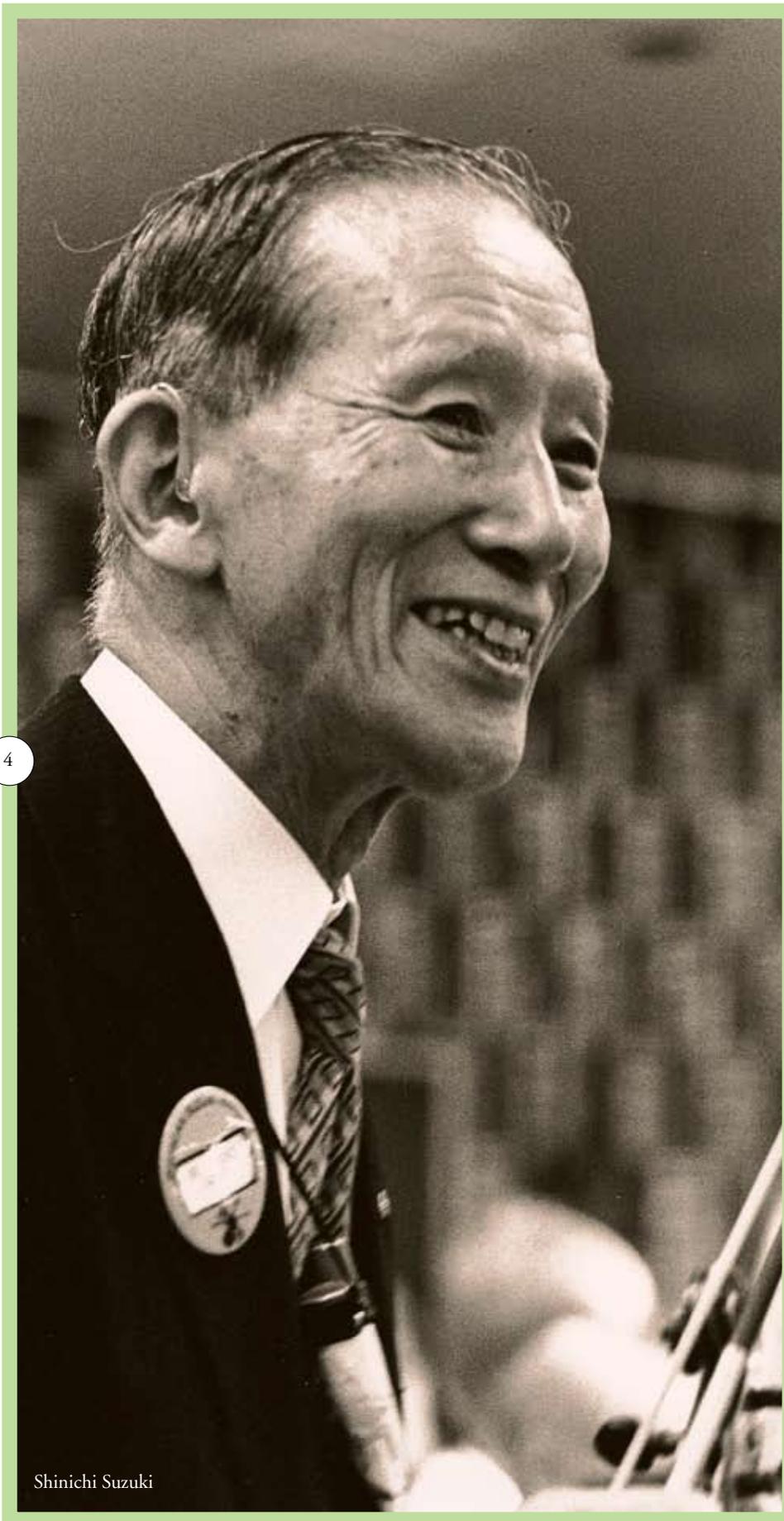
LB: Well, he didn't teach very young children—no teacher did in those days. He also didn't build technique very well, but he was a fine musician. I remember, he had an Airedale dog—a very sweet dog. The dog had a very acute ear, and if my lesson was going well, he'd stay and listen. However, if my lesson wasn't going well, and I was not playing very well, he'd get up, look at me balefully and walk out. Bright dog!

INTERMISSIONS: Who did you study with after Rakeman?

LB: My next violinistic influence came when I was fifteen, and my mother took me and my sister to Salzburg, where I had the opportunity to study violin at the Mozarteum, and that was one of the most amazing experiences of my life. I had a teacher there, Theodor Müller, who was just right for me. Müller had been a pupil of Ottakar Sevcik. He was one of the regular teachers at the Mozarteum, and he accepted me as his pupil for the entire summer that we were there. Müller asked me if I would be willing to spend the summer working only on “my equipment,” because he said this is wrong or that is wrong—he pointed out everything that was wrong including my intonation and my horrible bowhold. And I said that's exactly what I want, and I did it. It

Shinichi Suzuki was the creator of the Mother-Tongue Approach for teaching violin to very young children.





Shinichi Suzuki

turned me around so completely in the way I was playing that the next year when I had the opportunity to play for Louis Persinger, he accepted me.

INTERMISSIONS: How did you meet Persinger?

A lady in New York, who happened to know a cousin of mine, was acquainted with Persinger. My cousin introduced me to this woman who said that she could get me an audition for Persinger. I played for him and he accepted me as his pupil in New York.

INTERMISSIONS: So you moved to New York?

LB: Yes, originally I stayed with an aunt of mine, and then later my sister came to New York because of her great love of the theatre, and we moved in together, and the first thing that we did was to adopt a cat, because I had always loved cats. My mother had an aversion to any animals in the house, so we didn't have any pets growing up.

INTERMISSIONS: So originally you were accepted as a private student of Persinger?

LB: Yes, at first, because he said at the level I was playing, he could not get me into the Juilliard Graduate School. In those days, the Juilliard Graduate School was a different entity from the Institute of Musical Art. They had joined forces but as separate entities. The Juilliard Graduate School was called a "graduate school" not because they gave degrees—they didn't—they just felt they wanted high-level advanced students, you see. You could go to the Juilliard Graduate School without having any kind of degree at all.

INTERMISSIONS: How long did you study with Persinger before you applied to the Juilliard Graduate School?

LB: Three years. Then I did get accepted—tuition-free to Juilliard, and so I continued my studies there, with Persinger, of course. I also studied with him in the summer privately. At the end of each year, you had to re-audition for Juilliard. After three years there, the faculty committee felt that there wasn't anything more for me to learn. Persinger told me I had been "graduated." This was fine, because I had already started to concertize.

INTERMISSIONS: What was Persinger like as a teacher?

LB: He was one of the sweetest human beings that I have ever known in my life. I never heard him scold any student. The worst he would say was, "well, maybe that needs a little more practicing." He taught from the piano a great deal. He played the piano almost as well as the violin. You know, he concertized as piano accompanist to Yehudi Menuhin, and recorded with both Menuhin and Ruggiero Ricci. He played piano that well. He could play the piano part of the Franck Violin Sonata with ease. He almost spoiled you for every future accompanist because he was so sensitive and he played so beautifully. Basically, he didn't change much from my studies with Theodor Müller, but sort of used that as a springboard, and improved everything. Persinger assigned standard technique and would accompany you on the piano even in etudes. Vibrato was a prime thing with him—he was especially fussy about it. He also demanded that everything had to be beautiful—tone, tone, tone. He taught the sonata literature as chamber music.

INTERMISSIONS: When did you first play in public?

LB: Well, I played in student recitals and that sort of thing. My early performances were

basically chamber music—sonata recitals. I played with a woman, who was a good friend. We had management who arranged many recitals for us to play. I played several concerts in the US and even in the Far East. David Garvey was one of the fine pianists that I performed with—eventually he became accompanist to the great Leontyne Price. David was my pianist for my Town Hall recital in New York.

INTERMISSIONS: When did you begin teaching violin?

LB: I started teaching when I was twelve years old. I had a friend who was interested in learning the violin and was having great problems, so I started teaching her. I come from a family of teachers. Originally, I wanted to become the greatest violinist in the world, but it became apparent that I wasn't going to be. I had always enjoyed helping other people. My mother was a math teacher. My father had taught medicine at Georgetown. My mother's sisters had been teachers. Also, Persinger had me observe some of his lessons, and started feeding me some students who he felt needed special work. Eventually, I started teaching preparatory lessons at Juilliard as well.

INTERMISSIONS: When did you first meet Suzuki?

LB: He came here to New York. He brought a tour group of young children to Juilliard. Frankly, it blew me away. I was so fascinated that I arranged to have two weeks with no concerts in the middle of my upcoming Far East concert tour to be free so that I could go and study with Suzuki.

INTERMISSIONS: What did you do when you got to Matsumoto?

LB: I sat there and watched Suzuki teach.

Of course, he would explain what he was doing and respond to questions from me. It was all very open.

INTERMISSIONS: What led up to the founding of the School for Strings?

LB: Well, I came back from Japan, and there was all this excitement about Suzuki and his teaching. Suzuki had made such a big impression. There was a lot of curiosity about him and his teaching, and I had been there and watched him teach. So I started using the knowledge that I gained from him to teach the same way. People wanted me to do demonstrations and lectures. Very soon, I had more students that I could take, and in addition, other teachers came and wanted to learn how to teach this new way. So eventually the School for Strings just sort of happened—quite by accident.

INTERMISSIONS: How did the Suzuki Association get organized?

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LB: Well quite inadvertently. You see, more and more people just got interested in Suzuki's approach, and they met to find out more about it, and the Association just sort of got started. The American publishers started pushing for a more formal organization.

INTERMISSIONS: Who were some of your favorite violinists?

LB: Fritz Kreisler, Jascha Heifetz, Josef Szigeti. Kreisler was my favorite.

INTERMISSIONS: What is the most unique thing about the Suzuki method?

LB: The most significant thing about the Suzuki method is the early age at which training begins. Suzuki introduced us to this fact. That the younger you get the child, the sooner you will be able to train him.

IN CONVERSATION

STEVEN PALINCSAR ON SUZUKI VIOLIN TEACHING

QUESTION: After having taught the violin for so long, why did you choose to become trained as a Suzuki violin teacher?

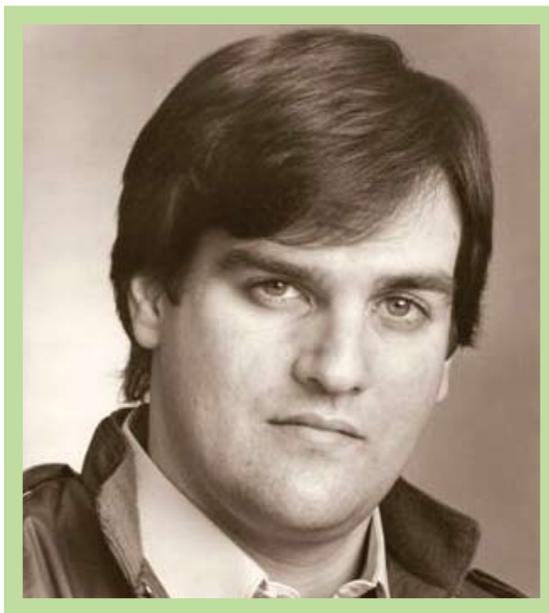
STEVEN PALINCSAR: Originally, I was inspired by violist Heidi Castleman, a member of the Juilliard faculty, who said that was what she wanted to do. Like her, I had seen the transformation of the violin-playing and teaching world through the influence of Shinichi Suzuki. Where once Suzuki Method-trained students were the minority, today virtually every new violin student comes from a Suzuki program. I was fascinated by this and decided that my becoming trained in Suzuki violin pedagogy would help to better support and strengthen my own students.

QUESTION: So you decided to give up your private teaching for two years?

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QUESTION: So you went to New York?

SP: Not at first. I had Suzuki 1A-1B with Ed Kreitman at his school in Western Springs. But again, while he was an excellent teacher, this was just too slow for me. I wanted to immerse myself in the Suzuki method, so I looked for long-term programs, where I could also teach both privately and in group classes. I immediately rejected master of music programs with a Suzuki emphasis—first because they were just too expensive, and second because a master's degree in Suzuki was just too limiting. I also wanted a program where the teacher-trainer came from a similar background to mine.



QUESTION: And you chose the School for Strings in New York?

SP: Yes, it's a two-year violin teacher-training program headed by Louise Behrend. In the second year, I had the opportunity to teach on the faculty of the School's prestigious *Start-Up* program, which provides full-scholarship training for minority and underprivileged pupils. I taught both private lessons and co-taught two separate group classes. In addition, Miss Behrend had similar training and solo experience. She had been a student of Louis Persinger, who in turn had been a pupil of Eugène Ysaÿe. Josef Gingold had also studied with Ysaÿe. So I couldn't have chosen a more appropriate school—for me, that is.

QUESTION: And you stayed two years?

SP: Yes, I am a graduate of the School for Strings' program. However, in the second year, I resumed my teaching in Chicago's North Shore suburbs, and commuted weekly to New York. After graduation, I became a registered Suzuki violin teacher through Level 8 with the Suzuki Association of the Americas, and am now a Life Member of the Association.

QUESTION: Did you begin teaching absolute beginners in the Suzuki Method?

SP: Initially, until I heard a presentation by Ed Kreitman at the Suzuki Association National Conference. Ed said that he taught only Suzuki levels 1-3. I had never enjoyed working with very, very young children aged 3-4. I always felt more like a babysitter than a violin teacher. So I decided not to accept absolute beginners into my class. To study with me, a student must be at the very least on Book 4, and should be about in third grade (but I will take younger

students). Also, I decided not to vary my fee for elementary-level pupils. So, I charge one rate per hour, and actually specialize in teaching much more advanced students.

QUESTION: What exactly is the Suzuki Method?

SP: To answer that question, let me first say that what we commonly call the Suzuki Method in America is really five separate components. These components are: 1) the Mother-Tongue Approach, 2) the Suzuki Curriculum, 3) the Pedagogical Approach, 4) the Philosophy, and 5) the Suzuki Culture. Only the first component is actually the Suzuki Method—the Mother Tongue Approach.

The others can be dispensed with. Of course to do so could be quite detrimental to the development of the student. I could, of course, design my own curriculum, print out sheet music, record and burn my own CDs. But, up to about the middle of Book 8, the Suzuki curriculum is expertly designed. I add additional materials such as Harvey Whistler's excellent books on shifting and double-stops, etudes by Mazas and others,

scales by Ritter-Stoessel, and additional repertoire as well.

The pedagogical approach, that is how to hold the violin and bow, how to stand, posture, drawing the bow, bow technique, left-hand technique, etc. varies with each teacher. I am not an advocate of the *Hamburger Approach* to violin teaching.

QUESTION: What is the *Hamburger Approach*?

SP: If I go into a certain national hamburger franchise's restaurants in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, and order exactly the same items each time, I will find that each item is made exactly the same way, and will taste exactly the same. There really is no allowance for individual differences. As a violin teacher, I am constantly aware of differing abilities, differing physical makeup of students, differing instruments and bows. A good teacher takes these into account and teaches the student (and parents) to celebrate the differences. I vary my teaching approach for each individual student.

QUESTION: And the philosophy?

SP: Well, Suzuki's philosophy was a noble one, but what if the teacher holds a completely opposite one. For example, a teacher who only teaches for money. The beauty (and genius) of the Mother-Tongue Approach is that it will still work and help to develop the pupil in spite of the teacher's motives.

QUESTION: How do *you* feel about Suzuki's philosophy?

SP: That was one of the weirdest experiences of my life. Before I was ever exposed to Suzuki's teachings, I attended an ASTA National Studio Teachers' Forum. Whenever I would talk about my ideas on teaching the violin, I would be asked "are you a Suzuki teacher?" "No," I replied. To which the response would always be, "that's strange because you have exactly the same philosophy as Suzuki."

QUESTION: And the Culture?

SP: Well, here we discuss a sensitive issue. One of the most difficult aspects of Suzuki teaching (to non-Suzuki teachers) is the bow. In most Suzuki programs, the student and teacher bow to each other at the beginning and end of every lesson. Why is this done? What does this have to do with violin teaching?

Unfortunately, most students do not understand the significance of the bow. For them it is an empty ritual. My own belief is that either the significance should be explained to the student (and parents) or it should not be done because in truth it has nothing directly to do with violin teaching. It is a means of centering. For the student, it is like saying, "teacher, I am ready to be taught by you." The teacher's response is "then I am ready to teach you." I like to discuss with the parents especially what being *ready* means.

QUESTION: So that brings us back to the Mother-Tongue Approach.

SP: Yes. The Mother-Tongue Approach grew out of Suzuki's ideas about language study. As a young man, Suzuki studied violin with Karl Klingler in Germany. He was fascinated by how difficult it was for an intelligent man such as himself to learn German, while young children were able to speak it so fluently. Later in Japan, Suzuki created the Mother-Tongue Approach based on his ideas concerning language study.

QUESTION: How did he do this?

SP: He created six basic steps: 1) Exposure, 2) Imitation, 3) Encouragement, 4) Repetition, 5) Addition, and 6) Improvement and Refinement. These are what the Mother-Tongue Approach is all about. First, Suzuki identified these steps from how a child learns to speak their native language. Then, he adapted them to teaching the violin. Next, he put them into practice, and demonstrated this Mother-Tongue Approach was an

efficient and effective method for teaching the violin.

QUESTION: In Suzuki programs, prospective parents are required to read Suzuki's book, *Nurtured By Love*? What is your opinion of this book?

SP: I personally enjoy the book, and return to it again and again. However, I understand that it really is not laid out very well for American parents. So, I often ask parents to read Suzuki's other wonderful book, *Ability Development From Age Zero*, instead. It is laid out much more appropriately. Another good choice for parents is Louise Behrend's *The Suzuki Approach*.

QUESTION: Suzuki said that all students have the talent to learn to play the violin, didn't he? Do you agree?

SP: What Suzuki said was that all students have the ability to learn to play the violin well. He didn't say brilliantly. He said well. Yes, I do agree. Even the most untalented student can with careful guidance learn to master a Mozart Violin Concerto. Play it in tune, in rhythm, with good articulation, with a beautiful tone, and with sensitive musicianship. It won't happen overnight, but I can teach any violin student to master repertoire if the student is willing to put in the necessary time to learn, the patience, and the diligence, and if the student's parents are dedicated enough to provide the necessary support. Suzuki identified what we call the *Suzuki Triangle*, where the student, the parents, and the teacher each form one side of the triangle. It takes all three to create a young musician.

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NOW ON CD

PHILIPS Eloquence Reissues Arthur Grumiaux Recordings

Koji Toyoda, a former student of Shinichi Suzuki, succeeded Dr. Suzuki as head of the Talent Education Research Institute in Matsumoto, Japan. Toyoda was also a former pupil of the great Belgian violin virtuoso, Arthur Grumiaux. Together they recorded the Bach Concerto for Two Violins on the Philips label. Recently, several of Grumiaux's recordings have been reissued on CD.

Arthur Grumiaux, one of the greatest violinists of all time, was born in 1921 near Charleroi, Belgium. Beginning his violin studies at age five, he graduated first from the Charleroi Conservatoire and then later earned First Prize in violin from the Brussels Conservatoire Royale de Musique, where he was a pupil of Alfred Dubois. Subsequently, he received the Vieuxtemps Prize and the Prix de Virtuosit .

Grumiaux made his professional debut playing the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto in E minor as soloist with the Brussels Philharmonic under the baton of Charles Munch. His British debut followed and later his American debut. When Grumiaux first played as soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, conductor Rafael Kubelik had to break a firm rule against encores because of the enormous ovation that was accorded the Belgian virtuoso.

Grumiaux began recording for Philips in the 1950's. His recorded repertoire was vast. He recorded concerti by Bach, Beethoven, Berg, Brahms, Bruch, Haydn, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Paganini, Saint-Sa ens, Stravinsky, Tchaikovsky, Vieuxtemps, Viotti, and Vivaldi, as well as Lalo's *Symphonie Espagnole*. With pianist Clara Haskil, he recorded the

complete Beethoven Violin Sonata Cycle. He has also recorded the Bach Sonatas and Partitas, as well as complete sonatas of Bach, Brahms, Corelli, Debussy, Faur , Franck, Handel, Leclair, Lekeu, Mozart, Ravel, and Schubert, as well as select sonatas by Grieg, Nardini, Tartini, and Vivaldi.

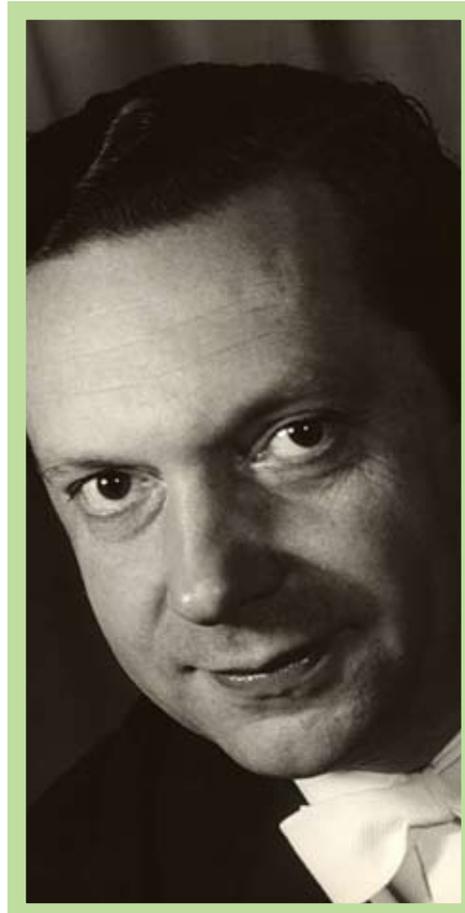
He formed the Grumiaux Trio, a string trio, with violist Georges Janzer and his wife cellist Eva Czako Janzer, and recorded the complete string trios of Beethoven and Schubert, as well as several other chamber works including the complete String Quintets of Mozart.

Among the recently reissued Philips recordings are the following:

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Arthur Grumiaux, the great Belgian violin virtuoso. Grumiaux's Philips recordings are enjoying a renaissance on the Philips Eloquence label.

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