

An Introduction to the

I LOVE to Read Music!™



Literacy Method

Some music educators won't even consider the "hear-play" methods of teaching music (Suzuki, Mother Tongue, etc.) because many students trained this way don't learn to read music as well as their traditional-method counterparts. The critics sit impatiently through a beautiful performance and can hardly wait to say, "Yes, yes, but can he read music?"

It is a problem. Suzuki students play expressively, accurately, and with beautiful tone, but because they memorize every piece, they seldom get enough practice in reading "what's on the page." Playing in ensembles becomes almost impossible as students grow up, so students often stop playing when they're teens, or even before, especially when they don't want to depend on a parent practice coach anymore to decipher the notes and rhythms.

Even traditional music students often can't read music as well as they can play it. When traditional students face some of the more difficult repertoire, they sometimes drop out, too, not being able to figure out the complex rhythms and notes.

In *Music Reading Primer* and *Sight Reading for Strings*, master Suzuki teacher Denise Willey has designed a music reading and sight-reading method to be used alongside the Suzuki ("Mother Tongue") and other hear-play methods. While students are learning to play in tune and with fine tone and musicality using the hear-play repertoire and technique, they are at the same time receiving effective instruction (taking only minutes a day) to develop excellent sight-reading skills—with the added bonus of developing such a fine ear that most of them are thought to have perfect pitch!

The program is based on a set of specially-designed *Complete Reading Flash Cards*. The first lessons include the actual note reading, using a unique sequence of singing the pitch on the card to identify it, *solfege* the tone with the *do, re, mi* syllables and hand signs, plucking the pitch on the instrument, and then playing it on the piano. A set of flash cards is designed for each of the string voices. Students learn to read the notes in all the beginning positions on the instrument, until they recognize and can play them instantaneously, practicing for just a few moments each day at home and at the lesson. (See *Handbook for Teachers and Parents*, by Cathy Wilson.)

While learning the note cards, students begin the music reading exercises in *Music Reading Primer*, taught with a method especially designed for this pedagogy. Students sing the names of the notes out loud as they play the little etudes, and count out loud as they play the rhythm exercises. The etudes in this reading book start with LARGE child-friendly note sizes for young eyes, and move slowly but thoroughly through chromatics, giving all of the notes adequate practice. The

very easy rhythm patterns start with basic rhythms, but progress to the more complex, until students are playing rhythms as difficult as you'd find in most ensemble repertoire. As in the entire method, the instruction and practice only take a few minutes each lesson or day, so the students can work mostly on performance repertoire.

After the happy students pass off their note cards, they move right onto the key signature cards. As they learn the cards, they learn to look at a key signature and automatically say, for example, "This is the key of G \flat Major or E \flat minor, six flats, B \flat E \flat , A \flat , D \flat , G \flat and C \flat ," and so on through all fifteen keys. We've seen a six-year-old do this. Think about it: how many college music majors can do this automatically, with all major and minor keys? Mrs. Willey says, "Little kids can learn anything!" All along this time, students also work their way through a scales routine, basic, advanced, and three octave scales, in different rhythms, bowings, and repetitions, always prefacing each scale with, "This is the scale of G Major, one sharp: F \sharp ," or the like. They also complete an elementary theory workbook, one exercise a week at home, which is checked and corrected at the lesson.

After getting the key signature flash cards down cold, students go right on to memorize the intervals, identifying them and singing them. After those come the musical terms and signs, which the children usually polish off in short order. Included are just about anything the students will find on a page of standard orchestra literature, including tremolo, sul ponticello, senza sordino, and dozens of others. Children can learn anything, little bites at a time.

While working in *Music Reading Primer*,

students begin to sight-read the lovely little etudes in *Sight Reading for Strings*, adapted from Franz Wollfarht's *Easiest Beginning Elementary Method*, playing duets with the teacher; then they continue to progress to *Advanced Reading Etudes*, *Advanced Rhythms and Scales*, and *Music Theory Workbook*, learning different clefs, reading in upper positions, and practicing more complex rhythm patterns.

If children begin these short and easy sight-reading lessons right along with their early hear-play lessons, they'll be ready to sight read anything put on the stand of a junior high or high school orchestra. In fact, they will undoubtedly be reading much better than their schoolmates, full of self-confidence, and ready to lead the section and serve others. If that happens in beginning orchestra in grade school or junior high, the student may, perhaps, take up another instrument in the orchestra (violinists might try viola, or cellists, the bass, and so on,) while other students catch up.

No more leaning close to your stand partner in orchestra, trying to copy his fingers and bows! When students reach the age when they want to play in ensembles, when they want to break away from Mother's tutelage, when they want to play music with their friends, they'll be splendid and independent players. This excellent method prepares students for a lifetime of playing and reading gorgeous music, embracing both superb hear-play technique and a solid background in music literacy and sight reading, allowing the well-trained musician to truly say: "I LOVE to read music!"