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# TOLEDO MAGAZINE

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## TOLEDO SYMPHONY SCHOOL OF MUSIC



BLADE PHOTOS BY JEREMY WADSWORTH

Lucy Morse, 8, takes flute lessons from Amy Heritage of the Toledo Symphony at the symphony's Old West End headquarters.



Eleanor Byers, left, and Loa Cho, both 11, help each other through a tune at the Toledo Symphony Space.



### Music education starts early with parents as key partners

By SALLY VALLONGO  
SPECIAL TO THE BLADE

**L**It is 6:35 on a June evening. Lucy Morse, 8, stands on a patch of sunlight slanting through blinds in a comfortable music studio in the Toledo Symphony's Old West End headquarters. She blows carefully into a child-sized flute, playing a simple tune from memory as music from mom Holly Morse's iPod delivers accompaniment.

The performance is nearly flawless. Lucy looks modestly pleased.

"Let's play it faster," suggests Amy Heritage, her teacher, playing the tune on her full-sized flute at the new tempo. Mom plies her own instrument and, voila! It's a trio.

It's one charming moment in a building full of them as the Toledo Symphony School of Music moves into its summer term inside the Professional Building, 1838 Parkwood Ave.

This relatively new component of the 70-year-old orchestra's operation centers on the teaching method developed by Japanese musician Shinichi Suzuki (1898-1998).

It's an approach to learning violin, viola, cello, piano, flute, and harp that starts with mimicry — the student gains just enough technical training to properly use his/her instrument, then follows the lead of the teacher playing a tune — over and over until it belongs to the student.

But, it also belongs to the parent. Parents are an essential element in this highly respected teaching method.

"We often talk about the Suzuki Triangle," explains the school director, Rachel Zeithamel, "an equilateral triangle with the teacher, student, and parent each composing one side."

Parents attend lessons and pay attention, even take notes, for they will become what Ms. Zeithamel calls the "home teacher" between lessons.

For example, down the hall from Lucy, teacher Cheryl Trace is leading a septet of enthusiastic violinists ages 5-10 through a series of dance tunes they have memorized in private lessons, group sessions like this one, and during home practice.

As family members watch from the room's edges, the tiny fiddlers are encouraged to call out their favorite songs.

"Gavotte," calls out one girl in long dress and flip-flops. Led by Ms. Trace, seven tiny bows, marked carefully with tape to remind students of proper position, deliver a solid rendition.

"Can we try it faster?" prods Ms. Trace. The players comply, looking confident and engaged.

Still, when new requests are taken, minuets, three of the players can't recall the fingerings.

Instead of simply allowing them to stand idly by, Ms. Trace tells them to hand over violins to family, but to hold on to their bows.

Thus, as four players pick out the melody, the three others bow along in correct time.

"What I like about Suzuki," says Ms. Heritage, assistant principal flutist in the Toledo Symphony and a relative newcomer to the Japanese method, "is the focus on the music, on the instrument, and on the teacher."

Students are encouraged to pay attention to all elements of music and to listen attentively, whether playing or not.

"All of the teachers have Dr. Suzuki's goal in mind," adds Ms. Zeithamel. "We want to develop the whole child. It is not about turning out virtuoso musicians, it



ABOVE: Cheryl Trace of the Toledo Symphony leads young students through a group violin lesson.

is creating wonderful human beings."

Downstairs in Claire Cho's group piano class, two girls sharing a piano bench try to help each other as they work through a tune. These students are advanced enough to read music rather than simply repeat what their teacher plays.

Even before instrument lessons start, the Toledo Symphony School of Music offers a way for the very young to channel their boundless energy into organized patterns. Run by Sarah Bright, Music and Movement is based on methodology created by German composer-pedagogue Carl Orff. At Ms. Bright's gentle, friendly direction, two young boys are gleefully but carefully marching, skipping, standing on one foot, dropping to one knee, and even touching their noses to the floor, all in time with fast-changing musical prompts.

says Ms. Zeithamel. "There are numerous studies comparing test scores of students who study music with those who do not, and it is not surprising that students studying an instrument score consistently higher."

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Claire Cho, right, of the Toledo Symphony applauds as Devyn Pienta, 8, practices his mother, Dahwi Pienta, watches.

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