

Listening Makes a Difference ...

Even to a Good Music Reader!

by Faith Farr

I have noticed that some Suzuki families, who were diligent about listening to the recordings repeatedly and daily during Book 1, often start to listen less as the students advance. Do they assume that listening isn't as important once students can read music?

I first experienced the importance of listening when I was working on my Master of Music degree at the University of Minnesota. I was a busy professional musician—in my mid 30s, teaching at MacPhail and playing in the Minnesota Sinfonia. My teacher wanted me to learn a piece I had never learned before, and we settled on the Schumann Concerto. Not only had I never learned it, but I had rarely heard it and I thought I didn't particularly like it. My teacher was going away on tour; I had three weeks until my next lesson to learn it.

My problem was the first two weeks were so full of teaching and performing commitments that I didn't have any reliable time to dig into Schumann. I was fairly new to Suzuki's ideas and I decided I should listen. For the first twelve days of my three weeks, I had my recording on continuous repeat—in the car, in the house—whenever I wasn't sleeping, teaching or playing, I was listening. Then with nine days and a dozen

pages to go, I started slogging through. I played slowly. I wrote in fingerings and bowings. I played small fragments. I noticed letter names and calculated intervals. I clapped and counted.

I was hard work, but I made progress. Page eight is full little runs and arpeggios with lots of accidentals and odd intervals and part way down the page, there is an optional cut. I thought, "I'm not really having any fun anyway, so I might as well learn all the notes and not take the cut."

But—it was like hitting a wall. My slow and steady progress stopped. The part after the cut seemed ten times harder than the part before the cut. But my musical analysis told me it was the same passagework as I had done acceptably before the cut. Why was this suddenly so hard?

Then I wondered.... So I got out the recording and for the first time watched the music as I listened. My recording took the cut. I had never heard the notes in the optional section.

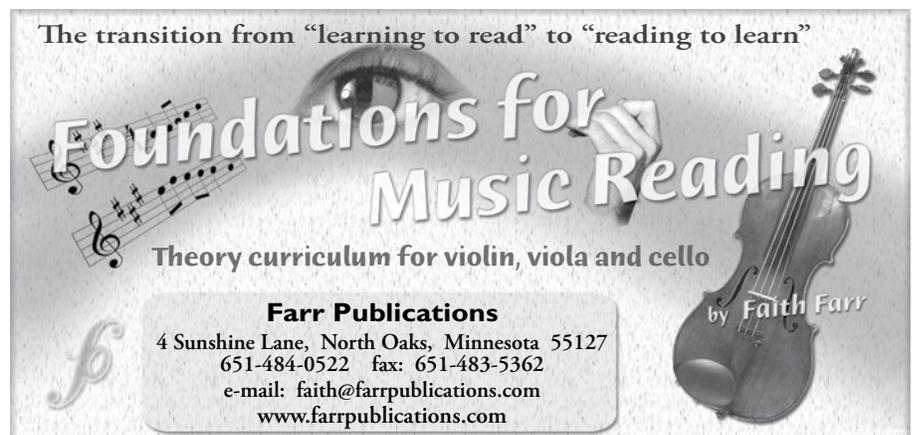
Even though I am a good music reader and I was using all my reading skills to learn the concerto, the section that I had heard repeatedly was possible and the section that I had not heard was impossible. I

wasn't aware that my ear was guiding me in the sections that I figured out—I was reading—thinking note names and intervals and counting rhythms. And yet an amazing subliminal presence was guiding me.

If listening makes such a difference to a professional level player, with good reading skills (and fairly poor ear skills)—imagine what a difference listening makes to students with good ears who are still developing playing and reading skills!

No matter how advanced a player you are, no matter how good a music reader you are—listening really works! If you want to learn a long piece—listen. If there is something hard in your piece—listen. If you find you are spinning wheels in practice, not making progress—listen. If you want to get more accomplished in less practice time—listen.

Faith Farr teaches at her home studio and at MacPhail Center for Music. She self-publishes Foundations for Music Reading, a music reading curriculum for young players. With Brian Wicklund she co-authored American Fiddle Method for Cello published by Mel Bay. ♪



The transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn"

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by Faith Farr

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The advertisement features a central image of a human eye looking forward, with a hand pointing towards it. To the left is a musical staff with notes, and to the right is a violin. The text is arranged around these elements, with the title in large, bold letters and contact information in a rounded box at the bottom.