

# From Russia With Love... Suzuki Teacher Training starts in Moscow

By Helen Brunner

Anke van der Bijl (flute, Vice President ESA) and I (violin, ESA Director for UK) have just returned from a remarkable few days in Moscow. The brand new Russian Suzuki Association had arranged this introductory weekend for interested participants.

Twenty five teachers came together for this seminar in Hotel Proton, a smart conference hotel in Moscow. They consisted of 12 violin teachers and 11 piano teachers: there was also an accordionist and a recorder player. Added to the seminar, in an advisory position, were two music-loving lawyers, a Russian composer from the Moscow Conservatory, a renowned Russian child psychologist, and our excellent interpreter, Viktoria.

It was surprising and touching to see the dedication and devotion evident in these warm-hearted people. Olga Viktorovna Sapryghina had organised the whole event, which impressively included persuading everyone to read 'Nurtured by Love' (in Russian) before attending course!

Anke and I had travelled three or four hours by air to reach Moscow, which felt like a long trek, but some of the teachers were from even further afield. Two teachers from the other side of Novosibirsk had had a five hour flight and another teacher took three days by train to get to the seminar. How vast is the Motherland of Russia!

The great tradition of Russian music has constantly shaped my musical life since childhood. I have always been in awe of the Russian masters of music. So what could we possibly have to offer to a nation which had produced David Oistrakh and Swan Lake, Rostropovich and Stravinsky, Diaghilev and Maxim Vengerov? All we could do was to bring the strength of the Suzuki message of love and acceptance, and that 'EVERY CHILD CAN'. The Russians listened agog.

Anke demonstrated the steps of the 'Suzuki Home' - education based on the Mother tongue approach of listening, repetition and refinement. She spoke of the construction of a private lesson and the importance of teacher-child relationships. There was much discussion about the ESA syllabus and audition material for violin and piano. We had many excellent DVD's to show, including children of all ages playing at a high level on a large variety of instruments. Also several Suzuki teachers speaking of their work, with great conviction, and quite a lot of black and white footage of Dr Suzuki himself. We also showed many Youtube clips such as the massed cellos, flutes and violins from the Japan conference. The famous Tchaikovsky concerto played by 18 children and directed brilliantly by Nicholas Kendall astonished the Russian teachers!

The 'Hands on' violin sessions with the 12 violin teachers, was based on Suzuki's Tonalization. We played part of the Handel chorus, each teacher playing individually and with the group. We explored some of the principle steps of circle training and the application of weight. During the seminar there was a remarkable improvement in their tone, which the Russian teachers could hear for themselves. The piano teachers were the jury - the progress in just two days was tangible. Big applause.

We do not yet know how many Russian teachers will in fact be able to afford the time or the money for the ESA full training. However, we do know that they really want to start something soon with both violin and piano, for Level 1. I have agreed to return to Moscow to start the violin course. We now urgently need to find a piano teacher trainer for the eager pianists.

