

The Western New York Mountain Bicycling Association will hold its seventh annual Bicycle Swap Meet and Expo from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday, April 1 at Main-Transit Fire Hall, 6777 Main S. For table information, call 632-1344 or e-mail [jerrine@aol.com](mailto:jerrine@aol.com) or call 634-7570 or e-mail [Rogeramjet@adelphia.net](mailto:Rogeramjet@adelphia.net).

# Babies can learn

## *Suzuki method used to teach infants*

by ELIZABETH TAUFA  
Reporter

*“A child’s education starts nine months before birth.”*

Those words were spoken by Dr. Sinichi Suzuki, a pedagogue of music education, to describe the unlimited learning potential of children.

“Children in the womb react to the music that the parents listen to during pregnancy as well as the sounds of their voices,” said Eloisa Raffel, a Suzuki-trained violinist.

Based on that philosophy, Raffel teaches an hour-long class for infants to 3-year-olds at 11 a.m. on Saturday mornings at the Harris Hill United Methodist Church, 8495 Main St., in Clarence.

Though Raffel is a Kenmore resident, she teaches at the church because of its proximity to the majority of her students, who are mainly residents of Amherst, Williamsville and Clarence.

Following the Suzuki Method of Talent Education, children in the class

learn to interact with others while moving to music and playing simple percussion instruments. The class ends with the reading of a story.

“The idea is not to create performers, but to give the babies an opportunity to find joy through music and to become a more noble human being,” Raffel said. “The goal is develop children’s abilities at an early age, help them to respond to music and experience the joy of



The Suzuki method can be used for children of any age. Here, 3-month-old Gabriel Vargas, takes part in the Suzuki class for babies.

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**“The goal is to develop children’s abilities at an early age, help them to respond to music and experience the joy of listening, understanding and appreciating music.”**

— Eloisa Raffel,  
Suzuki-trained violinist

listening, understanding and appreciating music.”

The class is not just for babies, however. Raffel, a native of Brazil, noted that parents are just as much a part of the class as the children.

“We teach the parents to use music to develop their baby’s abilities,” she said.

Children, according to Raffel, learn by repetition, so the songs that are sung and the stories that are read alternate between weeks, so that the babies can become familiar with the language and perhaps develop speaking skills sooner than expected.

“It’s not unusual that a child’s first word is one of the words from the song,” she said.

The group environment also plays a strong role in the children’s development in the class.

“Research says that you shouldn’t expect children under 3 to share anything,” Raffel said. “One of the first activities before the class even starts is sitting in a circle and rolling a ball back and forth. We’re always saying ‘Let’s share.’”

Raffel noted that there is only one instrument for the whole class, and it is important that the child learn to hold the instrument correctly in order to make the best possible sound. Because of this, students in the class are taught to take turns.

Because the age range of the group is varied, the younger students learn by

watching how the older students interact with each other and with the music. Raffel noted that the older students also benefit from helping the younger students to understand how the class works, which creates a nurturing aspect to their lives.

While the class is not geared to create prodigies, Raffel noted that approximately 95 percent of the students who graduate from the baby class move on to play an instrument — usually a string instrument.

“This is the first baby class in Western New York, and it was started in 2001,” Raffel said. “I have a couple of students who are now 6 years old who started with me at 18 months, and it’s nice to see them growing and the changes in them. Some of them needed a lot of discipline when they started, and now they’re wonderful, caring children.”

As far as musical potential in her students, Raffel said that people are not born with talent but learn it — a favorite philosophy of Suzuki himself.

“One of my favorite phrases is ‘Every child can,’” she said. “As a Suzuki teacher, we never give up on a child. If we believe that the potential of a child is unlimited, as a teacher we need to explore that.”

Part of the Suzuki teaching method is to accept that children develop differently, said Raffel.

There are fall, spring and summer classes, but registration is ongoing. Parents may also observe a session free of charge to determine if the class is right for their child.

For more information or to register for the class, contact Raffel at 553-1250 or [eloisarafell1@verizon.net](mailto:eloisarafell1@verizon.net), or visit her Web site at [www.suzukiviolinistswny.com](http://www.suzukiviolinistswny.com).

e-mail: [etaufa@beenews.com](mailto:etaufa@beenews.com)



Kenmore resident Eloisa Raffel started the first Suzuki Baby Class in Western New York. Here, she works with one of her older students, 3-year-old Tarin Rietz from Williamsville.