

TWINKLING FOR 50 YEARS: SIUE Suzuki, McCoy-Sulentic shine on young

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EDWARDSVILLE - When those in the audience watch **Vera McCoy-Sulentic**, director of the **Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville Suzuki program**, and her team on stage at concerts, there is a gleam of joy in their eyes that transcends their stage presence.

What could be better than inspiring and teaching these students from ages 3 to nearly the age 20 mark?

For McCoy-Sulentic, that is what has motivated her to continue all these years, the children and providing a spark that leaves music in their hearts and souls forever. Many of the children go on to play their entire lives as adults because of the start they received with SIUE Suzuki. Another motivator for McCoy-Sulentic is carrying on the legacy of **John Kendall**, who started the renowned Suzuki program at SIUE. This past Sunday, the SIUE Suzuki program held its spring concert and celebrated 50 years in existence, along with recognizing and honoring seniors.

Vera said over and over, she is asked how can you stand and teach “Twinkle” over and over for 30 years?

She quickly responds with her ever-piercing smile: “I don’t teach twinkle. I teach the student. Each student is another challenge to me and another set of unknowns and another way to specifically work with this child.”

Vera said many of the students who graduate from the program are well-known across the country in music.

“The community is what separates Suzuki,” McCoy-Sulentic said. “It is not just based on methodology books, but it encompasses the parent, teacher and what we do at SIUE to build a community of teachers, students and parents who support one another and create the environment where everyone is appreciated and everyone can learn. It is a very different mode of teaching you can’t find in other systems.”

SEE PHOTO GALLERY BELOW FROM 50TH ANNIVERSARY SUZUKI SPRING CONCERT:

SIUE’s Lovejoy Library houses the John D. Kendall archives. John D. Kendall was a leader in bringing the Suzuki Method to the United States. In 1958, he and several other American violin teachers saw a film of 750 small Japanese children, students of **Shinichi Suzuki**, playing the Bach Concerto for two violins.

Kendall published the first English language edition of the Suzuki method in the United States. He trained and taught for more than 50 years at the university level. Students came to SIUE from all over the world to study with him and he offered workshops and master classes in almost every state and throughout the world.

Kendall came to SIUE in 1975 and began the first Suzuki violin teacher-training program. The program today continues to train children on violin, viola and cello. Generations have gone through the program. Through thick and thin, SIUE's administration and board has stood tall on maintaining the Suzuki program, even when other such programs elsewhere were sometimes trimmed. Vera said she couldn't thank the administrators and board members enough for their support through the years.

Vera has a long history with the program, starting in 1986 when she trained under Kendall to become a Suzuki instructor. McCoy-Sulentic graduated in 1988 and remained here and eventually became director of the program in 1997 at SIUE. She will mark her 20th year as director of the program in 2017.

Vera, the students and parents treasure their relationships with her faculty and graduate students. Each year, the graduate students are second to none and this year was no exception.

The other faculty members are **Carrie Grace Beisler, Linda Bristol, Allison Heubner-Woerner, Stephanie Hunt, Erika Lord-Castillo and Vicki Lottes. Others are Kim Gindler, Courtney King, Daniel Meiloch, Ellen Singh and Robert Valentine.**

Graduate instructors are **Lauren Holt, Tony Moussa, Natalie Stawarski, Elaine Wisniewski and Stephanie Wooley.**

The senior Suzuki team members have traveled all over the world and this summer are taking another trip. The students never forget their travels, Vera said.

Once Vera graduated from the SIUE program, she taught in the program, then taught in public schools and came back in 1997 to become director.

Vera has a very descriptive way of communicating what John Kendall was about: "When I think of John Kendall, I think of vision, energy, charisma and enthusiasm. He was just able to be the ultimate teacher and he made you feel like you could do anything. He never seemed to be bothered by obstacles in your learning. He was always able to present things in a way that made any technical problem something that could be solved.

“He was warm, funny and he was a jokester. He pulled practical jokes a lot. He was very open, inviting graduate students to share meals, holidays and he gave of himself endlessly. He had a very profound influence on my life. I am honored to be teaching the classes he taught me. There is not a day that goes by that I don’t think of myself in the Suzuki class that teaches other teachers to teach.”

For Vera, she hopes for another 50 years of Suzuki and more long after she does eventually retire.

“The program is very strong and will continue for years and years to come thanks to the people I have here,” she said.





Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

SUZUKI STRINGS



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