

Beautiful Tone, Beautiful Heart

By ERIN REDER

For some children, playing an instrument is something their parents make them try, or a class that fulfills a school requirement in junior high or high school. Others, though, realize early that playing an instrument is their passion – something they were called to do. For S. Alice Ann O'Neill, her gift as a musician and cellist led her to the discovery of a second, unexpected gift – teaching.

S. Alice Ann began playing the cello through the public schools at age 7. "I fell in love with the cello immediately," she said. "I loved the sound, and the ability to play seemed to come naturally to me."

Sister participated in group cello lessons throughout grade school, and in the sixth grade, she began taking private lessons. "There were no professional cellists in New Brunswick [Canada - where she grew up], so I began to take the train to Halifax, Nova Scotia, which was a five-hour trip. I would stay all weekend; my cello teacher and I crammed in many lessons."

After graduation from high school, Sister determined she wanted to study cello performance at Boston University in Boston, Mass. "I decided I wanted it to be a career," she said. At the time, it never occurred to S. Alice Ann that teaching would be in her future – even though she had started teaching cello when she was 13. "I taught cello throughout my life, since teaching is the only regular income a musician can receive."

In 1999 Sister received a master's degree in cello performance and Suzuki pedagogy. "Teaching chose me," Sister said. "I had a gift for teaching but didn't recognize that at first." According to S. Alice Ann, Dr. Shinichi Suzuki, a Japanese violinist and pedagogue, developed a method of teaching music that touched her heart. The Suzuki method, she explained, is based on the philosophy that everyone can learn as long as the learning environment is positive and nurturing.

"Dr. Suzuki developed his method on a standard of excellence in teaching and learning. He placed a strong emphasis on character and relationships between the teacher, parent and student. It is not about becoming a fine musician; it's about developing into a beautiful human being."

While S. Alice Ann continued to travel as a professional cellist, teaching opportunities continued to surface. She



Three-year-old Sylvie Robinson sings "Parts of the Cello Song" with her Suzuki cello teacher S. Alice Ann O'Neill at Spring Recital 2007, held at the recital hall at the College of Mount St. Joseph.

completed her doctorate in cello performance and string pedagogy in 2003, and took a position teaching cello at the collegiate level at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio. She currently teaches cello, bass, string pedagogy, music theory and history; coaches chamber music; and plays in the faculty string quartet at the University of Dayton in Ohio. Sister also teaches at the College of Mount St. Joseph.

Along with her collegiate courses, Sister also teaches

Suzuki lessons at the Sisters of Charity Motherhouse each week. Her Suzuki students are typically between 3-19 years of age and younger than her college students, which is appealing, and rewarding.

During her Motherhouse lessons, Sister teaches the Suzuki method, which requires parental involvement. Parents attend lessons with the child and serve as "home teachers" during the week. Many times the parents learn to play the instrument before the child to fully comprehend what is expected of the child during lessons. S. Alice Ann and her Suzuki parents work together to create a nurturing environment for the students.

"I desire for all my students to grow as a person in self esteem and confidence, so they can do what Dr. Suzuki dreamed – grow into beautiful human beings."

S. Alice Ann knew at a young age that she was meant to play the cello. What she learned over the years was her call to teach was just as powerful. Today she uses both gifts to serve God's people and to praise God.

Students of Cincinnati Suzuki programs performed on the field of Great American Ball Park before a Cincinnati Reds game in May 2007. The cello students participate in Suzuki group classes that S. Alice Ann O'Neill teaches on Saturdays in downtown Cincinnati.

