

Podcast 455: Homeschool Music with Gena Mayo

Episode Transcript

Andrew Pudewa: If you've got kids, and kids get frustrated, and they get emotional, and they get overwhelmed from time to time. If you can make a quick and easy transition into singing, you will improve everything physiologically and emotionally.

Julie Walker: Hello, and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, "IEW." My name is Julie Walker, and I'm honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

Julie Walker: So for the past almost four years now, or maybe it's been longer than that, we've been doing these Homeschool 101 podcasts. And, and basically it was the idea that you came up with because there are so many, there were so many as a result of the pandemic in 2020, new homeschoolers, and we thought, well, let's just see if we can have some episodes dedicated just to them, kind of give them a leg up.

And so we call these Homeschool 101. And today on our Homeschool 101 podcast, we have a guest, and actually that guest is you, Andrew.

Andrew Pudewa: Okay, how does that work?

Julie Walker: So we have Gena, who has been a longtime fan of IEW, has been watching us and watching you, and decided to basically take over a portion of our business. And I'm not going to even say anything more about that.

And Gena, I'm just going to say welcome to our podcast.

Gena Mayo: Oh, thank you. So fun to be here.

Julie Walker: Before we turned on the recording, I was just thanking Gena for essentially extending a legacy. Go ahead, Gena, your podcast.

Gena Mayo: All right, since I am on the IEW Podcast, I think I should give a little bit of background about myself, but then we'll get into all the questions because I'm going to interview Andrew today. My name is Gena Mayo, and I'm a homeschooling mom of eight. I run Music in Our Homeschool to help all homeschoolers easily include a quality music education in their homeschool.

And I think that's how you found me, but I found you because of IEW because I've used the writing materials with my kids, and it's been wonderful. And we did public speaking last year and that was great too. So thank you so much for creating that. But you called me in the fall

of 2020 and I was shocked because Andrew Pudewa was calling me. What's this about? But you told me that you would like me to take over something. So that's what we're going to talk about today. And it is *Singing Made Easy*. So could you share a little bit about your background? We'll get into that later, but tell us a little bit about your background related to music. And I know you were a violinist and a violin teacher, right?

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. So I was one of the very first Suzuki violin kids in Southern California. I started playing violin when I was five years old in 1965. So now everybody knows how old I am. And it was very new at that time. My mother had her master's in music education, and she was a piano and voice teacher. She also played the violin. So I just grew up in a very musical environment. And as early as I can remember, there were students coming to our house, and she was teaching, and I was occupying myself, or I was outside. But I just had this tremendous musical saturation level.

And so she said that I was begging for a violin from the time I could talk. I don't know why. But she found a teacher who was actually the concert mistress of the Peninsula Symphony, which is an amateur orchestra that my mother played in. Elizabeth Holborn, and it was a long drive. I think it was 45 minutes, which seemed like an eternity when you're six years old. But I joined that, and she was just trying to figure out how Suzuki Method worked. It was very new, and it was this idea where, oh, you listen to records and learn, and then you get together and play with other children in groups, and you can teach very young children. So, that was my childhood.

Then I grew up. I had a string quartet in junior high school that was. (that's how old I am. Nobody says junior high school anymore.) That was one of the best things, socially, for me, was being one of two violinists along with a cellist and a viola player. And we did various little events. I think we played at some weddings and we got together and the girl who was the first violin in this quartet, I had a phenomenal crush on her. It was very distracting, but I got through it. And then, I quit playing for a while in my later teenage years. Cause you know, as happened, you can get interested in other stuff. And then in my early twenties, I was asked to teach violin at a little school that was associated with the church that I was connected with.

I thought, well, I don't know if I can do that, but I tried. And then I discovered this whole world of Suzuki music education had grown hugely over that time. And there were now programs at universities. And so I traveled to some Suzuki teacher training programs. One week, they called them institutes at different colleges in different states, and I thought, okay, there's two types of people I'm meeting here, teachers who really know what they're doing and teachers who don't seem to know what they're doing in the same way.

I thought, if I'm going to do this, I want to be one of the ones who really know what they're doing. And the common factor was, they had all either been to Japan, or they had studied in Japan, at a university with someone who had been to Japan. So I was ready for kind of a move on and do something different with my life.

I thought, why not go to Japan? So I lived in Matsumoto for three years, studied with Dr. Suzuki in the 80s. And I graduated from there and then came back and was teaching at the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential for a few years, also learning about child brain development. And then I needed to move, actually back to where my mother was living in Montana. And I went full time into teaching that and also Kindermusik, which I don't know, have you heard of kinder music in your

Gena Mayo: I'm trained in Musikgarten, and I've been teaching that for almost 30 years.

Andrew Pudewa: Wonderful. Yeah.

Gena Mayo: Very similar to Kindermusik.

Andrew Pudewa: I actually met Lorna Heyga in the Kindermusik teacher training I first went to in San Francisco. It would have been in '86 maybe? '87 real early. So I loved her so much. And then of course she sold her Kindermusik out to her investors because of philosophical disagreement, and then took kind of the purity of the things she was wanting and founded Musikgarten. So I did that for a few years. So I was full time music until '95, and then I started Institute for Excellence in Writing as a part time gig. I was trying to figure out a way to make enough money on the side that I could afford to continue being a music teacher.

Gena Mayo: Oh, that's fun.

Andrew Pudewa: And keep my wife home so we could homeschool kids. And then the, Excellence in Writing became a larger revenue source by '99, and then I went full time and quit teaching music formally in 2000.

Gena Mayo: So did your music teaching actually influence the Institute for Excellence in Writing?

Andrew Pudewa: Well, what I saw when I went to Canada, and I saw the Structure and Style method, As Dr. Webster and Mrs. Ingham were teaching it, I thought, this is philosophically and even practically very much a Suzuki method for teaching English composition. There's kind of a pathway, and everybody walks the pathway.

It's an incremental development. There's a continuous review and mastery approach so that you don't just stop playing a piece because you learned it and forget it. You keep practicing that piece while you learn another piece and then you keep making those pieces better while you learn a new piece and developing this large repertoire of memorized repertoire as a key to a high level of ability and mastery.

And I saw that with structural models and stylistic techniques. Yeah, you did it, but that doesn't mean you stop doing it. You keep doing it until it's easier and easier and easier. And then when it's easy, you add in the next step, you go to the next model, add the next thing to

the checklist, so that over time you just develop this natural, almost effortless mastery and fluency with these ideas.

That struck me very, significantly when I first saw it. And then over the years I was doing both, I was seeing more and more parallels between the Suzuki method or what in Japanese translates more accurately to talent education or ability development and the writing method that Webster had kind of stumbled into. And I don't know that he actually ever knew the power and the brilliance of what he was doing, although hopefully by the end of his life, which was fairly recent, last March, actually, he passed on at 96, I believe, and he saw what, what we had done with IEW to preserve that legacy.

So, that was kind of the connection there.

Gena Mayo: That's really fascinating. I love the history that you've gone through. Were there any memorable experiences or students' success stories that stand out from your time as a violin teacher?

Andrew Pudewa: Well all of us love those students that do really well and make you look good, and I had some of those. Honestly, when I think back, it's actually, I consider the students for whom things were just harder. You know, they didn't catch on as quickly. They didn't have quite as much inborn aptitude, and they had to struggle a bit more. And I look back on that and think, it's possible that for those kids, growing up playing music was even more valuable, that it had an even greater impact on their intellect, their brain development, their spiritual, their self-discipline. And I think that was one of Suzuki's great contributions was to say, you don't just teach talented kids to play music. Every child can learn. And you have, if you do it in the right way and follow the right principles, which he developed fully and effectively during his phenomenal lifetime. And so, I kind of think back on some of the students who were the tough ones. And a couple of them I've kept in touch over the years.

Gena Mayo: Oh, that's fun.

Andrew Pudewa: That is fun. But I like to remind all parents that growing up playing a musical instrument is an experience, it's a formation that just simply is not acquired in any other way, in the same way.

Gena Mayo: So true. Well, I'd love to transition to talking about your mother now. So tell us about her and what inspired her to create *Singing Made Easy*.

Andrew Pudewa: When I went to Japan, she had...Suzuki violin pre-dated Suzuki anything else. So Suzuki piano was probably about 10 years later that anyone had ever heard of it.

Gena Mayo: I did do Suzuki Piano when I was a kid.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, did you? Wow.

Gena Mayo: Mm hmm.

Andrew Pudewa: So when I went to Japan, she came over and stayed there for, I think, six weeks, maybe, maybe a couple months, and was studying with Karaoka Sensei, Haruo Karaoka, who kind of was tapped by Suzuki to be the Suzuki piano, at least in Japan. And then there was a woman from Canada named Valerie Lloyd Watt, who wrote the first book on Suzuki Piano.

And so she came over and studied and became a real convert. And you know, it was very different than the piano instruction she had grown up with as a child. She started playing when she was 12, which is a little late by Suzuki standards. And then she, of course, studied music at UCLA and took her master's there, but she became really very convinced that Suzuki Method was the best way to teach piano.

And then in the world of voice, it was very odd because there were a lot of voice teachers who did not want to teach children until puberty, after for the boys, the voice had changed for the girls, they had matured and she thought that doesn't make sense. You know, you start playing the violin, you have a little tiny violin and then you get a slightly bigger one, you get a slightly bigger one, you get a bigger one.

So your violin size is changing. But everything is transferable, shouldn't your voice be the same way? Your physical part of your body that makes music, that you sing with, will change as you grow, but all the things you would learn, they're all transferable: pitch sensitivity and learning to sing in harmony, of course discipline with rhythm and then breath control and not straining.

All of those things that you teach to a voice student as a teenager could easily be taught to children. So she wanted Suzuki Method voice.

Gena Mayo: Okay.

Andrew Pudewa: Unfortunately, or fortunately, I don't know, it, the way, the way it turned out is there was another woman from, I believe, Finland, Päivi Kukkamäki, kind of a cool name to say. She also came to Japan and she managed to convince Suzuki and, and whoever's on his leadership team, cause he was pretty old by then. She managed to convince the Suzuki International that she is the one who should create the Suzuki Voice method. And write the books and make the recordings and do all that.

And so he kind of gave her the trademark Suzuki Method rights to do that. And as far as I know, nothing much ever came out of it, but it bogged down the whole process of anyone else wanting to do a Suzuki method for voice. But my mother had been working on her own, kind of more American, curriculum of songs, because we've got our tradition "My home's in Montana, I wear a bandana..."

Gena Mayo: I love that one so much.

Andrew Pudewa: yeah, I did too.

So she started in creating her own thing, but she couldn't call it Suzuki Method. And so she called it *Singing Made Easy*, and created books and levels and recordings. And her husband was a pianist and a recording guy, and so she had the wherewithal to produce it technologically. And then I was actually teaching a preschool class for a few years in Montana, not far from where she was living. And so she came over and would do singing with my preschool kids. And then I had recordings so they could listen to those at home and memorize all the songs very easily. So my little preschool, Bozeman Talent Education, was kind of a lab school for her as she was developing the *Singing Made Easy* curriculum.

And then I stopped doing that, but she kept going up through Level 4, and then she had a Christmas one, and she came out with character-based songs. But, as is so often the case Teachers are not the best marketers. Teachers are not necessarily the best business people. We saw this in Canada with the Blended Sound-Sight, Mrs. Ingham, Dr. Webster. They love teaching everybody how to do this stuff, but they had no idea really how to, how to sell it in such a way that they could generate revenue to sell more of it and grow it because to grow something, you've got to have cash flow. And so that was the case with my mom. And I tried to help her and we started selling the *Singing Made Easy* as kind of an offshoot of IEW.

And then she passed on. And basically it was on my head to either try to continue it as a separate business or roll it into IEW or find someone who could do a better job because honestly, I loved it. And I loved what she did, but I didn't have the time or bandwidth. She passed on in 2012. And so that was really in the throes of me just being out traveling a hundred days a year and working and making more products on our end. So that's when I thought. I don't need the revenue, business. I've got plenty to do on my own to grow IEW. I would love it if someone whose real specialty was music, particularly for families and homeschoolers to really take this thing and see where it could go and where it could be. And that's, I think, when I contacted you.

Gena Mayo: Yes. So, we have all of the *Singing Made Easy* materials at Music in Our Homeschool. You can find them at musicinourhomeschool.com/singingmadeeasy. There's five levels and the Christmas Carols Made Easy. So I have all of the recordings that your mom recorded herself of the songs. There's rounds, there's songs in other languages like French and German and Spanish.

Then I recorded some videos and added some vocal warmups with it too. I studied music in college for music education. And then I got my master's in vocal pedagogy, just like your mom did. And so her philosophy just fits right in with what I agree with, with the way I would want to teach it, and I don't teach private voice lessons like she did anymore, but it's just wonderful to be able to carry on this legacy and have it at Music in Our Homeschool.

So thank you so much for contacting me about that. I'm just glancing through a few more questions.

Julie Walker: Can I interrupt with a question, Gena? I am the grandmother, and I have a granddaughter. And actually, I have several grandchildren, but my granddaughter, who is seven, which I believe is a really good age to start music training, almost on the old side for Suzuki. How could I supplement her education with *Singing Made Easy*?

What would I get? How would this actually play out?

Gena Mayo: Yes. So you would want to start with Level One and Marsha, that is Andrew's mom, said that that's perfect for ages three and up. So she made these songs so that child as young as age three, but she said she had a man in his sixties start with level one. So it really is for all ages. And you have the sheet music there, you have the recordings, so you can listen to her sing it, you can watch me sing it, if it's easier to do it with video.

There's also accompaniment tracks, so when you do learn the song, you can sing it along with an accompaniment track, those are all included. Or there's piano music, accompaniment music, if someone can play the piano and would like to accompany that way. Also, most of the songs are in two vocal ranges, a low and a high version. So if you find out that one is a little too high or one's a little too low, you can switch to the other one. So that was definitely what I would start with with her.

Julie Walker: Nice. Thank you.

Andrew Pudewa: I love... I don't know if you've bumped into Dr. Carol Reynolds. She has a tremendous curriculum for music history, music appreciation, culture, and she said many times, I've heard her say many times in her convention talks, God gave you the best musical instrument that you could wish for, and it's right inside your own body.

Why would you not learn how to play it? Why would you not learn how to sing? And of course, that children sing, really, before they even talk, they will work with pitch and harmony. I'm always pointing out that music is critical for good language development because language is essentially music, right?

It's rhythmic, it's tonal, it's dynamics. It's all the things that you learn from growing up in a musical environment that will facilitate quicker language development. One of the things I find very sad is that it's very rare now to find public schools where all the children do much in the way of singing in the early grades, the primary and elementary grades. Whereas if you were to go back even probably 80 years ago, every first grade class, every second grade class, they would be singing, developing a repertoire, singing for the assemblies or for the parents. And I know at one point in time, and I'm not sure how far back you would go, you couldn't even get a job teaching first or second grade if you didn't know how to play the piano because you didn't have recordings, so you had to have a piano in the classroom, and that was a norm for primary and elementary education, probably 100 or more years ago.

And now people have become basically just music consumers. And any kids who do learn to sing often are learning to sing from watching Taylor Swift videos or something even more nauseating.

Gena Mayo: Oh boy. Yeah.

Andrew Pudewa: So, I wish that we could see, and I think, with the kind of revival of classical education, a greater emphasis on music in the early years where the aptitude is more easily and more firmly established.

Gena Mayo: Yes, completely. So how can parents use music as a tool to enhance their writing or other subjects in their homeschool?

Andrew Pudewa: There's a lot to be said about that. One thing we know is that children can memorize stuff quicker and more easily and with more permanent retention if they do it to music. So you could memorize the presidents of the United States or the capitals of every state or some list of anything. But if you memorize it to music, the repetition required to get it solid and then the long term retention is much, much larger.

So if we were to incorporate more music into memory, we would see good results there. We also know that songs are pretty much the last thing people forget at the end of life. You know, so you can forget the name of your spouse, you can forget everything you ever knew and still remember songs that you learned in childhood.

So it's deep, deep, deep level brain connect neural connections, which is brain development. So there's that aspect of it. There's also, and I think you will find this very interesting, the breath benefits of singing. So, when you breathe in quickly and breathe out slowly, you're activating the parasympathetic nervous system, which causes a dilation of your whole blood vessel system, all your capillaries.

And that means you're getting more blood and therefore more oxygen into all of your cells, including your brain. It helps to lower the heart rate and calm emotions. So, I've been learning about this a lot, kind of in the whole world of fitness and health and longevity and biohacking. And so people are saying, yeah, breathe in quicker and breathe out faster. You calm yourself. Well, what does singing do?

Gena Mayo: Exactly. You've got to learn how to do that.

Andrew Pudewa: So if you've got kids and kids get frustrated and they get emotional and they get overwhelmed from time to time. If you can make a quick and easy transition into singing, you will immediately improve everything physiologically and emotionally. To me, that's a huge tool right there to enhance everything you're trying to learn.

So there's the memory side, there's the physiological side, and then there's just the joy of doing it and learning to do something with other people, particularly in harmony. One of the things that my mother loved was rounds. And children just absolutely love a round because

they get to sing something they know, but they get to sing in harmony with others, and then that can move out into singing in two parts, and then that moves out into an experience and a desire for learning to sing in polyphony. And this is just something that is so culturally obscure to almost everyone today.

The only people who really do sing in harmony would be I suppose people who go to uber traditional churches that actually have things like hymnals with four part notes on the page and enough old people who remember how to sing a tenor or a bass line or an alto, rather than just singing with a guitar and a drum set with a PowerPoint. The experience in churches used to be one that was much more musically enriching and educational than it is for most people today. So I think that's sad. And I think that's one thing that we have to intentionally try to recreate in families. There's that old saying, families that pray together, stay together.

And then there's a new one, families that stay together, stay together. But I think that there's a third there, which is families that sing together will stay together in spirit. They will have experienced the beauty of making music, which it's not just a metaphor. It is a true thing to say that music is the language of the soul, and singing is the most intimate way that we can experience that.

Gena Mayo: I'm thinking that you're saying that you would recommend for all homeschoolers to include music education in their homeschools.

Andrew Pudewa: Especially for young children, it's probably more important than reading or writing or doing math when you're 5, 6, 7 years old.

Julie Walker: Andrew, I need to insert here your talk: Cultivating Language Arts Preschool through High School. And you spend quite a bit of time in that preschool area talking about the importance of listening and the value of listening to music. And the kids actually start anticipating the parts of the music.

Andrew Pudewa: And I'm expanding that this year into a talk on cultivating attentiveness.

Julie Walker: Nice.

Andrew Pudewa: Which is a whole area we could probably do in another entire podcast on how music contributes to cultivating that skill of attentiveness better than almost anything else you can do, particularly with young children.

Gena Mayo: That's one of my favorite concepts that I do with Musikgarten when I work with the young kids, helping them with attentiveness.

Well, one last question. How do you hope *Singing Made Easy* will be used by homeschooling families today?

Andrew Pudewa: Well, I think if somehow we could explode the awareness that it exists and how it benefits, then we could actually affect tens, hundreds of thousands of children in a very

positive way to bring more of the making of music into their life. And you know, if you grow up singing, you naturally will want to play an instrument: the piano, the violin, cello, clarinet, whatever. And playing a musical instrument is such a blessing. I can't imagine there's any adult I wish I hadn't grown up playing the piano or violin. No. Everyone who grew up playing an instrument, whether they do it in adulthood or not will say that was so valuable. So I think singing— you don't have to buy a piano or a violin—all you have to have is a book of music and a recording to help you. And any parent can do it. Any parent can do singing with children. And I think her title was perfect: *Singing Made Easy*. It's not a mystery, but there is a pathway. There is a better way to get going than to just haphazardly imitate whatever is in your environment.

And so that's what I hope we'll find. And if somehow you had a couple hundred thousand dollars to market the thing.

Gena Mayo: That would be nice.

Julie Walker: Yeah.

Andrew Pudewa: Then more people could find out about it. But until then, we'll keep talking about it.

Gena Mayo: Yes. We'll just keep sharing and people can find it at musicinourhomeschool.com/singingmadeeasy and carry on your mom's legacy of helping every family be able to do singing at their own home without having to hire an outside voice teacher.

Andrew Pudewa: I have to say too when you experience children's desire for it, it's tremendously motivating. I was driving my three grandchildren home to where they live, which is about an hour from where we were. And I said, do you want to listen to an audio book or do you want to listen to music or do you want to just talk?

And they all agreed, let's just talk. Okay, fine. And so that went on for a while. And then, one of them said, Hey, let's sing! Because they're all in this little group of kids who sing. And they had learned how to put together “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” and All the Saints Go Marching In. Because they had just done this for an All Saints Day party.

And I don't know that those two songs kind of go together in a roundish manner. They must have just been singing that all together for 10 minutes. And the oldest one was, no, it's not right. Start over okay, let's start over. And we get the clapping. So we get the rhythm and the beat. And finally they did it really well. Of course, I'm singing along too in the lower register. And they finally go, “that was good.”

Gena Mayo: Oh, I know when you do something like that, it just makes you feel so good.

Andrew Pudewa: And it's the moment where you say, This is so worth continuing. This is so worth investing the time and effort into doing it. And that's really all it takes is time and attentiveness. It's not an expensive thing to learn to sing.

Gena Mayo: I just wanted to say thank you so much for taking the time to share all that with me today. I knew there was a lot more backstory that I didn't have, and I'm so happy I have it now.

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: And thank you for giving me an excuse to talk about one of the most favorite things that I don't usually get to talk about over here because we're always into the technical side of language development. But it's all one fabric.

Julie Walker: So, listener, I just wanted to let you know that what we did today is going to be served in both our Arts of Language podcast and Gena's Music in our Homeschool podcast. And so if you've heard this twice, well, all the better for you.

Andrew Pudewa: And Gena puts up little videos, too, on, I think, Instagram, maybe TikTok. All sorts of little nuggets of great advice for parents who want to get more music into their home.

Julie Walker: So as usual, we'll include all those nuggets and links in our show notes so that you can refer back to it. Gena, what a joy, what a pleasure it was to have you here on this podcast. And yes, I love the idea, Andrew, of us having further conversation about using music as a tool for developing attentiveness.

We all need that. Do we not?

Gena Mayo: Yes.

Julie Walker: Thank you.

Gena Mayo: Thank you.

Julie Walker: Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to our podcast in iTunes, Stitcher, or Spotify. Or just visit us each week at IEW.com/podcast. Here you can also find show notes and relevant links from today's broadcast. One last thing: would you mind going to iTunes to rate and review our podcast? This really helps other smart, caring listeners like you find us. Thanks so much.