



Time to Practice Podcast

Interview Transcript for Episode 7 with Dr. Shu-Yi Scott

On this week's episode we are speaking with Dr. Shu-Yi Scott. Dr. Shu-Yi Scott holds a MM in cello performance from Penn State University under Dr. Kim Cook and DMA in cello performance from the University of Texas at Austin under renowned pedagogue Ms. Phyllis Young . She became a registered Suzuki cello teacher trainer in 2019.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Shu-Yi has given more than 50 online courses for teachers, students and parents. Teaching beginning students from the age of 3 to advanced high school cellists, her expertise and patience helps students from all musical backgrounds excel. She uses her knowledge of child development to creatively target the needs of her students, keeping them motivated and growing. Her private lessons, group class offerings, and parent education nights help to foster a community of lifelong musicians. We talked about practice, parenting and how young musicians develop their own voice. I hope you enjoy this conversation!

This episode is brought to you by the Time to Practice Pep Talk series. You can find more information on the events tab of my website ChristineGoodner.com.

Christine Goodner: Today. I am thrilled to be talking to Shu-Yi Scott, and we're so glad you're here to talk with us. I was hoping you could start by telling listeners a bit about who you are and what you do.

Shu-Yi Scott: Yes. Thank you for having me. I'm really excited. I'm Shu-Yi Scott and I'm originally from Taiwan and after I finished doctorate degree at UT Austin, I started my Suzuki training and now I'm a cello teacher trainer living in Austin.

I teach teachers how to use the Suzuki method method to teach cello lessons. In addition, I'm really passionate about online teaching and how to incorporate group class teaching to help studio teachers, expand their business and, and their studio. So that's what I've been doing.

Christine Goodner: Yes. I have really benefited from learning from you and thinking about your ideas so thanks for that. I'm really curious to ask what music has looked like in your life, during the pandemic, maybe personally, for your own practice, as well as your teaching life.

Shu-Yi Scott: When you mentioned this question to me, I just felt it is a very big question because I consider my family pretty musical. My husband is a bass player. I have two daughters now, 18 and 12. T

They're both Suzuki cello kids. And in our house, we listened to a lot of classical music, but also all of jazz because that's what we like. Also during the pandemic lock down, I think I actually reached out quite a lot because at first I was a little bit bored.

I didn't know what to do. So I started taking jazz Cello improv with one of my dear, dear friends Renata Bratt, cello jazz expert. So that had been a lot of fun. Then I also took theater improv. And then, I think I started browsing, IMSLP to see what's really there to do learn.

So music wise, we, we found ourselves listening to more music you know, because we're all home. And I started relying on livestreaming concerts, like Berlin philharmonic, to kill time first. And then it became like, The place where we can feel kind of a release.

So I would say music became even more important and maybe even more intimate for our family life. So that's where we've been at. Of course, everybody really relied on online learning a lot. So both of my daughters, They have their own Zoom teachers. My older one studied was studying with Tanya Carey and my younger one's studying with Avi Friedlander both in Chicago.

So that, that had been a great anchor - both the children learning during this year. So other than that, we just listen more and watch more and learn more.

Christine Goodner: Thank you for sharing that. I think sometimes one thing I've heard is that a lot of the things that used to motivate students and musicians before the pandemic, like live performances and maybe being at a live concert, went away and we all had to re-invent or re-find our motivation.

Shu-Yi Scott: Oh, right that's the part I forgot to mention. So yeah, like you, everybody started learning, how to use all these options, and platforms to provide better learning quality for our students. So I have given like three studio recitals, they're all online, but numerous, just driveway concerts, kids came with their picnic blankets, with masks on and when the weather was nice in Texas.

So that part actually did help a lot to boost the spirit of my cello community locally. I have to say all of the parents really appreciate having an opportunity to see all the kids and, and hear everybody playing together, even though we're all six feet apart.

I remember the very first time it was in December, it was kind of cold and as a tradition, we always play the cello national Anthem, the French folk song together from my pre-twinkle playing on open strings to book eight students – (they all) like playing French folk song ensemble together.

And I could tell there was (pauses) it was very profound. It was music that really spoke our heart at that moment. So it has been hard, but I feel together, I have made, a lifetime experience with my students and their families.

So I know we won't forget that moment for sure.

Christine Goodner: Wow. That gives me goosebumps to think about, I think we all just realized how much we value music in our lives this year and connecting with people. That's definitely so profound. Right? I took some things for granted that I hope I never do again. As far as making live music with others and seeing live music performed.

Shu-Yi Scott: Yes. I definitely think so. I can't wait to have a chance to give you a real hug.

Christine Goodner: Right? (both laugh)

Well, I wonder if we could go back a ways and just think about when, when did you first start music? What sparked you to learn music as a beginner? I don't think I know what age you did that, but I'd love to hear the story of what made you want to play the cello.

Shu-Yi Scott: Oh sure. I wasn't a Suzuki student, you know, coming from a very humble background. My parents, you know, they were musical, they like singing, but, not really classical music raised, neither of them.

So, my first music experience is actually a public school orchestra opportunity. I think it was fourth or fifth grade elementary school had a funding and there was a devoted general music teacher decided to start a little cello . . . No, it was a string ensemble from scratch. Yeah. That's how I started cello because nobody wants you to take it. (laughs)

So after that, I really fell in love with cello and I somehow got accepted to go to a music magnet, middle and high school.

Christine Goodner: School programs are so important because many students, I think wouldn't be exposed to classical music instruments with that.

Shu-Yi Scott: Exactly. That was a life-changing event for me, for sure. So I hope we can keep providing opportunities like that to any community.

Christine Goodner: We talk a lot on this podcast about practicing. So I'm wondering, did you always love to practice or was it ever hard for you?

Shu-Yi Scott: I think I'm pretty sure my personal experience about practice.

] It's very different from my daughters, but I like to share, from both those situations. So I started from liking cello a lot to going into the music magnet school, where it's a ultra competitive situation, right away without much preparation. So at first I really resented practicing because everything's about competition.

When I was in, the middle of school a lot of students later quickly moved to the states and, started, at the Julliard prep school with no problem, you know, technically, no problem. So now you can imagine how competitive that was. And so I really didn't like it at all (practice) during those formal years of education, I would practice because the environment was there.

I was set to practice two hours a day before I could take a break. So I did that. I think passively, I learned a good foundation, but, psychologically I was resentful. I didn't really feel I had my voice until maybe until I went to graduate school. At graduate school where the professor said, "you pick what you want to play," you know, "here's your space, what's the program?"

You know, they gave me guidance, but (I was like) "Why do I have to come up with my own ideas?" And "you mean, I can give recitals anytime I want, and it's not just required by somebody? required by the schools?"

And so I that's where . . . I mean, it's kind of delayed, but I actually didn't find my voice and passion until I came here, you know, for my graduate studies.

But I think because of that experience, and the extremely different experience it gave me the opportunity to see why when somebody is very good at playing the cello, but not happy. And somebody

who is so passionate about cello, but doesn't know how to - I feel I've been in both shoes. And I think that kind of experience, I always tell myself, you know, early riser is not always the best. So all of these vast experiences helped me to become a better teacher.

So then when I, when I started teaching my daughters Cello. I think I was really, really careful about making it, not my agenda (but) making it their agenda, you know, or not superimposing, what I think is the best for them, but, you know, at their age level of their development, to what extent can they make a choice?

I would give them the choice, but if they need if they need the guidance, I'll give them that. Not, it's not saying there was no struggle. There's always struggles and banging my head, I guess. "what's going on??" But I think, I think with my daughter's practice becomes more like, sort of a science lab or like an arts and crafts kind of, kind of mindset.

So we'll try something together. And when they're tired, they can take a break. Or if they want to try something new, I let them, improvise something or change or put a story, to complete change the articulation of a song. It's fine. Cause I want them to find their voice. I think if they . . . if their mind is activated during any practice, even if it's just singing a silly Lightly row in the car, I think that's part of it. So I have in my studio - I have tips for a car ride practice or kitchen practice.

Christine Goodner: That's fun. I love it. I think that's really important to think about - we want to play at a high level and have all the skills there and I'm sure that's what the program you were in was aiming for with very good intentions, but not to lose our ability to have a passion for it, or the joy of music at the same.

Shu-Yi Scott: Yeah, that, brought me to this story that, you know, of course I'm not young anymore. So like when I had a chance to see a friend, I'll go back to a friend who graduated from that program. I often ask them, you know, what's your takeaway from that experience? And I think one of them now is a really renowned Cello professor at a great university.

And I asked him. You know, he had wonderful resume. And I said, "you know, I would like to help my daughter to reach to that level." And, he said, "don't change anything! I've followed your Facebook posts. You're giving your kids so much, so much different experiences."

When he looked back, he felt his childhood has nothing but cello . And that was a really profound sharing, you know? So it really depends on what we want.

What do we want for our life, or do we want to help our kids achieve or, or include in their childhood? I think maybe thinking from that perspective, and then the day to day practices is probably, is not so daunting.

Christine Goodner: Yeah, it was, it brought to mind when you were talking, I heard an interview with a gymnast and I'd have to look up who it was, but she said she was really grateful that her training as a gymnast was very rigorous, but also, she was allowed to do other activities and that she had met gymnast from other countries where the tradition was your whole childhood is in the gym training.

And then when they were passed, you know, the Olympics, they didn't have any other interests to follow or they weren't sure what to do with themselves. So I think giving our children the gift of, you're a whole person and music is part of what you do, but it's not all that you do or all who you are.

Shu-Yi Scott: No, and it's very hard. I think I'm sure Christine, you know, this as a Suzuki teacher teaching your own children and then, you know, making sure they have a certain level of musical achievement. There's also the expectations from other, from your peers that, if your children are taking Suzuki, violin or cello they must be reaching a certain level. Right. so that has been an idea that I had to work so hard not to let myself get affected by because I need to constantly remind myself it's their life. It's not my life.

Oh, so-and-so says, "oh, your daughter is at such an advanced book level. She must be going for music major." And I have to really let myself calm down with that kind of thing. It's of course everybody meant well. Right?

But I really need to make sure that I'm protecting each individual's life space and let them write their own stories for their life. It's hard. Yeah. That's the really hard part as a parent and teacher, you know, you have this double role situation right? And there's some outside pressure.

Christine Goodner: I feel like people always ask me like, oh, are your daughters violinist too? And actually my daughters both became vocalists. One of them played the flute as well, and they had the leads in their high school musicals and they really Accomplished a lot in that area. And it was really important for them to have their own interests and to do something different from me because it sort of got unhealthy to be doing the same thing.

They needed to be individualistic that way. And I could have insisted they do what I do out of some sort of ego or "I'm supposed to, because I'm a violin teacher", but I was important for me to think about what is this student or child passionate about.

Shu-Yi Scott: Yeah. Uh, yeah, I think as a teacher we're in the day-to-day, we're in lesson one lesson, helping a child to correct something, kind of helping your child to get better moment to moment. So it's very easy to think in that moment to moment.

We do that with our own children, but there's so much to learn - to step back and step further back and let them find their own direction. I found that the hardest lesson actually during a pandemic is that's when my older one was looking for a college to apply.

And she had, during that time, she decided not to seek for cello major, but social justice and, multi cultural studies will become her passion. And, but the fact that she's looking for a school where there's a good music program, Made me feel good. Yes. I, I'm not telling her to - I'm not dictating anything, but she decided to make us decision like that.

So, well, we'll see. That's not the end of their learning or, you know, the goal of their life, but I'm just happy at this moment that milestone has reached to that direction for her. But it's super hard, you know, cause the pandemic, (there has been) a lot of confusion, a lot of, uh, high level of anxiety and, it was just so much stuff to learn.

Christine Goodner: Right. Absolutely. I think this, the next question I was thinking of sort of maybe leads from that, or might just be clarifying that topic a little bit. I was just curious what you hope your children take with them, from learning music, whatever that is, you know, professional or not professional as adults. What do you hope it gives them?

Shu-Yi Scott: That's a very good question. And I think I often share this with my students' parents also - it's I'd really think that learning cello or me teaching cello is more about life skills. So I always think about

any, of the decision I decide for the next step for the student's next assignment. I would think about either it's time management or critical thinking . . . why? encourage your students to think about why are you doing this. Does this assignment help you with anything else? I feel if I, if I say something and the student just follow me passively. I actually feel that's a failure of my teaching.

I don't want students or parents just to take this prescription and follow and just swallow it. I want them to really feel, "oh yeah, this is a project. This is a collaboration."

So I think simply to answer your question again, is that I want that this, all this cello learning to Become a part of a rich life, and survival skill kit for my kids to be able to apply to other things.

And that includes, "oh, we don't have three people, but we have a cello quartet. Why should we do?"

And then, you know, my second one we'll look at the parts and (say) " oh, this part is more important because . . . " You know, so sometimes it's problem solving or like, oh, "pants on fire. Why should I do?" I enjoy that kind of the transformation.

And, and to me, that's the success of cello teaching. It might sound weird

Christine Goodner: I relate to that a lot and I love it, I was talking to Kimberly Wong. She's in the UK. She was saying as a Suzuki child, she feels like she got the superpower of, she feels like she can really do anything. She just has to pick a place to start and then work away at it rather than being overwhelmed by things.

I think that ties into what you're saying. Just like problem solving or here's this big goal. Maybe it would be easy to say, "oh, I can't do that." But we really learn as students learning music. "Oh, here's two notes I can start with" or one measure, or we really learn how to break things down.

Shu-Yi Scott: Exactly. I remember this is probably all slightly off topic, but I remember when my husband was in an interview for a financial job and they ask you, "what's your emergency solving experience?"

And he brought up this, you know, showing up to a jazz gig. The pianist was an hour late and he, and the guitar and the drummer had to put something together for an hour. And that was so impressive to the interviewer. I think that as a studio teacher, also, we are managing our time. We're managing our soft skills or, you know, the hardware and everything.

I often think I'm a CEO of some big company because we're in charge of a lot of layers of information and, management. I think every teacher who's listening should pat on their shoulder, we're doing great.

Christine Goodner: Yes, so many moving parts and so many details. And I think same for any parents or caregivers or practice partners at home listening. I think they're doing their own version of that. Thinking about how do I keep this child motivated or how do I find what their interest is or activate their own brain in the process?

Shu-Yi Scott: Yeah, yeah, for sure. And having a community like this, that you're building with the podcast is very important. Reaching out is very important and hearing other people's experiences. Ups and downs is definitely helpful. I wish I had had something like this when I was raising my kids 10 years ago.

Christine Goodner: I do too (laughs) I think that's why I want to do it. My former self needed that for sure. Well, I always like to ask people as we get towards the end of our conversation to share a practice tip. If you could think about something that is striking you as important with the families you work with today or your own children, what's a practice tip you'd like to leave listeners with today.

Shu-Yi Scott: Oh, there's so many. Well for young children for very young children, my tip would be parents set the model when the parents wanted the kids to practice and they don't want to comply or they want the phone.

Parents should practice and fail and let the child see the struggle and let the child be the teacher. That's always a great tip for my pre twinkle and book one. May I add another tip? (Christine: Yes, please!) It was for older students. When the students are more independent, I often use a timer to calculate how many times or how many seconds they would actually need to practice a certain tricky spot for five times or 10 times.

And they realize, oh, 's only 27 seconds. You know, 10 times is daunting, but it's only, you know, less than 30 seconds. So I think both are my favorite tips.

Christine Goodner: Those are great tips. Yes. I think doing that, finding out together how much time something takes, those really helped because a minute, like you say, versus 10 times sounds so much more doable.

Like you said, we could talk for hours on end about practice tips, but I'm thank you for sharing those with us for the different ages. (Shu-Yi: Oh, you're welcome!)

So if people want to connect with you and learn more about, especially your classes for teachers or any of the other work that you do, what's the best way to connect with you?

Shu-Yi Scott: yes, I, I would say because I have a lot of upcoming new projects, some are for String teachers - creative solutions to help anything from building a studio, to teaching, to recruiting, to including parents. it's all there. I would say the best place is to go to my website and my personal websites, showy.com, S H U Y Icello.com there that can, they can find all the information they would.

Christine Goodner: Thank you. Great. Well, we'll share a link to that too, so it's easy to find. Well, thank you so much. It's always a pleasure to talk with you and I look forward to the next time we get to do that already. Yeah, same here.

Shu-Yi Scott Thank you very much.

Christine's top 3 takeaways:

- 1. Finding our musical voice often involves being giving choices and making decisions and I loved how Shu-Yi found her musical voice late (in her words) but has worked to give that to her children earlier.**
- 2. We learn so many life skills through studying music!**
- 3. Give choices whenever we can, and guidance whenever needed. This is great advice for any parent, and especially helpful in music practice.**

We hope you enjoyed this conversation! Subscribe to the Time to Practice podcast on your favorite podcast platform and follow on social media so you're sure to see future episodes. We can't wait to share them with you!