



Episode 38: An Interview with Grazzia Rode-Sagastume

Christine Goodner: Welcome everyone! I'm excited today to be talking to Grazzia Rode-Sagastume. And I was hoping you could start by telling us a bit about who you are and what you do, especially related to music.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

Well, thank you, Christine. My name is Grazzia Rode-Sagastume and I was born in Honduras in San Pedro Sula and I moved here to the states when I was nineteen, to study music. And I've been here ever since. So this is my 16th year here in the United States. I'm a Suzuki Viola violin and early childhood music teacher. I'm currently the interim director for summer programming at the Omaha conservatory of music. And that's where I teach. And I also do a lot of outreach education with our String Sprouts program. And we started a really cool group called, caregiver coffee circle, where we meet every month with parents it's free and we just have a topic we read, or sometimes we just talk about it. I became a Suzuki teacher 10 years ago when I first learned about Suzuki. So I had never heard about Suzuki method ever until I started my masters at the university of New Mexico with Susan Kempter.

Christine Goodner:

I think we've talked about this, but I took one of my unit trainings from Susan Kempter as part of my teacher training, just, just for one unit, but I just, I really, really love her. She's wonderful.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

Yeah. I love Susan. She's great. Yeah, I've learned so much from her and also like, not only in the teaching part, but also like how to advocate for yourself. So she's just a wonderful woman.

Christine Goodner:

I would love to hear <pauses>you know, you shared that you didn't grow up and the Suzuki method because you didn't learn about it until later. What was music learning like for you? How old were you when you started an instrument? And I'd just love to hear anything you remember about starting music as a child.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

Yeah, so actually, I was a soccer player up to, well I was 17, but my mom wanted me to do something more related with the arts. So when I was 13, she took me to the school of music in my hometown in San Pedro. It's called Espquela De Musica Victoriana Lopez. And when I showed up there for the audition, I was one of the older children and everyone had had like previous experience with instruments and I had never played an instrument in my life. So they asked me to audition and by the grace of God I got in. I don't know how, but they accepted me and that's how I started. I started when I was 13 and they wanted to give me the Violin as my instrument. And I just fell in love with the viola at first sound. I, I even remember going to the student who was doing the demonstration and I asked, oh my goodness, that's such a beautiful piece. What is it? And he's like, it's called the G major scale. And I was like, oh!! <Laughs>

Christine Goodner: I love that.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

I was just like entranced hearing the Viola and I had my first violin lesson and I cried. Oh And I was just like, I just really wanted the Viola. And, and they sent me back to the Viola teacher and yeah, they, I'm a very short person. I'm five foot three. So, they were like, "well, good luck with the Viola. They're pretty big." But here I am. So I'm still playing it. And that's, that's how I started when I was 13. And when I was about 17, when I had to kind of decide am I gonna be doing more sports or music? And it, there wasn't any hesitation. I just decided for music. I loved it. I was in love. I still, every time I play my viola, I'm like, yes, this feels right. Just feels right.

Christine Goodner:

Oh, I love that. And I'm so glad that you know, they listened to you and let you switch.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

Yes. I'm so glad to! I think the teacher was very annoyed to see me cry, because he was like this like older gentleman. And he was probably not very comfortable with little girls crying in front of him. So he was like, oh, okay. Uh, you can, and we'll, we'll let you figure that out with the Viola teacher. So I'm glad he did that,

Christine Goodner:

Right? Yes. It all worked out. Oh, how interesting do you remember liking to practice or what was practice like as really a young teenager when you started?

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

You know, I remember everything because I started, so late. I remember that at the beginning, I didn't really understand or correlate that practice made you play better. So I, at the beginning, my first year, I didn't really practice as much as I could, but after the first year, my second year at the school of music, I won first chair for an orchestra. (Christine: Wow). And I had to practice, but then I had this like sense of (being) very excited whenever I nailed something and I liked it. So I didn't really think about it then, that practice made me better and I played better. So I felt happier, but I just really enjoyed practicing so much that my mom would have to tell me stop. So that's how, but I think it's because of the age, you know, like I was a teenager and I just connected with music so much that that's how it happened. And I, I'm not sure if this is the right word, like the sense of competence. Like I, I just really enjoyed feeling that I was doing good. And the responsibility, of course, like if you're a first chair you have to <pauses> you have to play well,

Christine Goodner: That's right. There's no hiding in the back.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume: Oh yeah. That's right. Yeah.

Christine Goodner: So interesting. I, you know, we laughed when you said you didn't realize practice would make you better, but I do see with my students,

sometimes they understand what to do intellectually. So they think, oh, I, know it, but putting it in our muscles and doing the repetition so that it's easy to play is a whole other thing. I think that's not always obvious to us.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

Oh yes. For sure. It was. I remember that it was kind of like a little light bulb. Like, oh, if I practice, I get better and I enjoy playing music that okay. Of course, you know, when I got older and things got busier, it was a little bit different. But yeah. I remember that it was fun.

Christine Goodner:

Yeah. That's wonderful. And I think that cycle of, I like this, I'm getting better at it. That just feeds the motivation to keep doing it. So that's great.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

Yeah. I feel like that's <pauses>, I see it all the time with my Suzuki students when they go to the group class, they might be, I don't know, like on Allegro, but they might learn like a little bit of song that is more advanced and they'll come back to lesson and be like, I think I learned the first measure of the song and they're just so motivated and they want to show off to their teacher and they want to play with their friends. And I remember when I was a teenager that my favorite classes were orchestra, of course, and choir, I just loved that sense of community. And we're all doing this together, so I think that children get very motivated with that too.

Christine Goodner:

Yes. The motivating thing is not often that I'm in my room alone or in my room with my parent practicing, but it's when we get to bring those skills with other musicians. I remember that being the most exciting thing for me as well.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume: That's so much fun.

Christine Goodner:

It is. And that's, I like what you're saying, not everybody, of course, who listens is, you know, involved in the Suzuki method, but having some social outlet for your child with music. And that's why we do group classes as Suzuki teachers, but that

feeling of, oh, I have to show up and play with other people, So I want to work on this. And also it's just so much fun to make a bigger sound with a bigger group of people.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume: Totally.

Christine Goodner:

When do you remember deciding you wanted to be a teacher or a professional? You came to the states, you said to study music. You said a moment ago that you had to decide about sports or music and what are you going to commit to? I don't know if any of that, or if you remember any of those decision making moments?

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

So actually I think it started in my undergrad because I used to play on this 16 inch viola. And it was just, I, I didn't know how to work with the bigger instrument and had about three injuries. And I had time off in between the injuries. And one of the injuries that I had, the physical therapist kind of told me, like, you might wanna look at doing something else that is not music. That kind of made me think . . . I want to do music! So I looked into being a music librarian and being some part of music or music therapy and then I looked at the pedagogy. So I, read this, book by Kato Havas and I was just like, oh wow. She's, she's small. Like me and I read her book. And that's how I started getting interested with teaching because I realized I could learn how to play healthier with healthier habits.

I started taking Alexander technique lessons as well. So I became more aware of what I was doing with my body. And I was very fortunate that I went to the University of New Mexico because they had a pedagogy program there. And initially I was just going to do Viola performance as my master degree. But when I got there, I remember a very dear colleague and friend of mine. His name is Charles Regauer. I think you know him from Louisiana, he is at the Centenary school in Louisiana. I met him for the first time. And he told me you're doing the master's in string pedagogy, Right?? First time I had met him. I said, I don't know. I'm not sure I'm not very good with kids. And he just looked me straight in the eyes and he said, you need to take advantage of this opportunity. He's like, don't let this pass.

Like, don't be silly, do it. And it really hit me. So I said, okay, I'll try it for a semester. And the first time that Susan put me to teach a group class for 15

minutes, I freaked out, because English is not my main language, my first language. And I just felt so ridiculous and self-conscious. And I remember going to her office and I cried. I'm a crier. So I went to her office and I cried. I said, I don't think I can teach. I don't think I've got it. And she knew better. And she told me to stick to it. She's like, try it for one semester. Let's circle back and talk about it. And yeah, I'm glad she did that because after that first semester and having more experience, I started to feel like, okay, I got this. It's been great. The reason why I decided to be a teacher was because initially, I didn't want other children that loved to play, to have injuries, how I had injuries. So that's how it started. I was like, I wanna help other students not develop injuries, how I had them.

Christine Goodner: Wow. And the rest of his history. Right. I love that.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume: And the rest is history. Yeah. <laughs>

Christine Goodner:

Just so interesting that people we come across in our lives who are see something in us that we don't realize is there.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

Yeah. Yeah. It's funny because I don't know if Susan remembers this, but I remember once in like my first year she's she was talking to me, giving me feedback. She said, you know, you should really look into doing Suzuki Early Childhood training. I think you would like that. And this was like 2012, 2013. And I was like, oh, I don't know. And then five, six years later, I was like, I really wanna do Suzuki early Childhood So it's like, she kind of knew before I knew what I like.

Christine Goodner:

Oh, that's amazing. Speaking of that, we both are trained in Suzuki early childhood. What is it that you really love or find rewarding about that program? This is from birth to age three or four, depending on the program. Typically for those who aren't familiar with it. What do you like about teaching that curriculum?

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

Yeah. I, I love that there's two weeks of curriculum that we rotate in and I love seeing how the children, you know, through repetition, they start evolving. So

every lesson you start seeing little things, you start observing like, oh, they moved their mouth when they held the ball. I think they wanted to say, say "here I am." Or, and then all of a sudden, they might just say, very quiet "here I am." Or something like that. And you just see them evolve, which has been amazing. We've also had the opportunity here in Omaha to do some of a Suzuki early childhood education slash box slash going into violin class. So I'm doing those in some of the pre-Ks and the kids are older, they're three or four, but it's been amazing. We're working with different pre-Ks. And some of the classes I have, the children are non-verbal and they respond so well to the Suzuki childhood education curriculum.

They, they know TA Taka, TA, TA, and they just know it so well. And it's, that's very rewarding to, to see it, that they're enjoying music. They get excited when they see the lollipop drum. And I love it because I can see the kids going through these stages. I also love it because they're happy. I see the parents having a blast with their kids. And I think that's such a beautiful and unique moment to have these one to two minutes of seeing your child face to face and it's beautiful. I love that curriculum. It's great. And I can't wait to do stage two. I've only done stage one, so I can't wait to keep doing it.

Christine Goodner:

I agree. The moments of connection and seeing the growth, it's almost like you can just see development happening in front of your eyes and these little moments that happen. So it's very special. And I think in those early years, being able to have an influence on enjoyment of music or bonding with a caregiver, a parent, all of those things are so, so important.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

And also telling the parent, like, did you notice they raised their hand when we were doing the good morning song and they might have not noticed, but then they start observing their child in a different way. And they'll say, oh, I've noticed, they're starting to raise their hands to say hello to people. So it's really nice to work with the parents at that level too.

Christine Goodner:

Could you share a bit about String sprouts and the work you're doing with that program? I'd love for you to share what that is and what your role is?

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

Yes. The String sprouts is an outreach education program at the Omaha conservatory music. The curriculum was written by Ruth Meints, and I think she's very soon or right about to be a violin teacher trainer with Suzuki, which we're very excited (about), but she created this curriculum and it a hybrid of Suzuki with el systema qualities. And we work a lot with underserved communities in Omaha. I think there's a program in Scotts bluff, Nebraska, Kansas city, somewhere in California. I can't remember right now, but the program is providing accessibility to learning an instrument in group class. We provide the instrument, the instruction for free, and there's a little parent caregiver class component at the end of classes. And it's been great. Our program has over a thousand students right now here in Omaha. We have a very big concert in may. One with the symphony it's called Sprouts and the symphony it's, level one, the first year students and the students that are graduating that have been in the program for five years. And then we have another nice concert that's on the park and we're just having big picnic and we're all just jamming and playing together. So it's, it's beautiful. And I've been teaching in program for seven years. This is my seventh year and I love it. I love it so much.

Christine Goodner:

Yeah. What an amazing program. You were telling me a story about a family in the program that went through a sudden change of circumstances . . .

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

and his mom was, became a single mom, all of a sudden. So it was her with all her kids and she couldn't bring the child anymore to lessons. So the classroom, the parents, I told them like, Hey, so, and so - you know, if someone could give them transportation and it was just amazing to see how the community showed up and they took turns bringing the child and being with the child and helping each other. And I think that that was very unique. I know that she received a lot of help, not only bringing her child to the sprouts class class, but also families would do meals for them or, you know what I mean? Like they would help in other ways it was very special and they're still in the program. So that's, that's amazing.

Christine Goodner:

Wow. That is amazing. Yeah. I'm sure there, with over a thousand students being served, there's so many stories about amazing connections like that happening.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

Yes. There's very, that, that was the one that I thought about the, when you asked me the question and I think that was the one that, that is still like the most shocking for me. Um, I think it happened in 2017 or something like that, it was a few years ago. Yeah.

Christine Goodner:

Wow. Yeah. And just, I think of all the research about just children, having adults who respond to their needs and are present and there with them and the long term impact that has on them as people, you know, music aside seems like a lot of things like that are happen here. Making a big impact.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

Yeah. I was reading a while ago that even if like the parent, like, it would be great if the caregiver's the one with the child, but even just having like a grandparent or anyone, makes such a big difference, especially in those first five years, which I, I thought it was amazing because a lot of people, and at least in Honduras, we're basically raised with our grandparents because our parents go to work and we're with our grandparents the whole time. And I'm very grateful that we have that.

Christine Goodner:

Absolutely. You know, not everybody is, can be with their parent for many reasons all, all day long where you're saying work or all sorts of situations. But knowing that teachers and grandparents and even friends can really be there for students and it makes a huge impact is yeah. Yeah. Really amazing. I love that. Well, we mentioned earlier about the caregiver sessions that you've been giving and I would love you to talk a little bit more about that and just share like, you know, what's your vision for that? Because I think, as caregivers and parents, we might be able to seek something out like this for ourselves. If we feel like we need it. And for teachers listening, you know, maybe get spark some ideas of how we could support families we work with.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

Yeah. The group is called caregiver coffee circle. Incidentally, we do have have a coffee shop inside of the conservatory. It's called Accelerando. So we meet there, once a month, we've been reading some of your book Beyond the Music Lesson And then I just started bringing just a few different articles to the group. And what we do is we show up, uh, Saturdays at like 11:30 AM. It's open to anyone it's free and we've marketed where it's not only Suzuki parents, like anyone could come. And I think anyone could get a benefit from this class and show up, get coffee. And then I will have some printouts or highlighted sections. And we just take a couple minutes, maybe 10, eight minutes to read. And I usually have some prompt questions already ready to stimulate conversation. And I might ask one and we start with one and then another parent contributes and we just kind of go with the flow.

But I really love that it's created a space for parents to talk. And it's really nice because we've had parents that maybe they just started lessons with their child. And then we have parents that have been with children in lessons for 10 years. So they're just, there's different levels. And they support each other in different ways. The younger families might say, oh, I don't know if this is for us. It's getting a little bit tricky. And then the older families might say, Hey, stick to it. It's worth it. And then the older families, what I've seen is when the younger families celebrate these little things like, oh, they just learned twinkle. The older families kind of get a little nostalgic, like, oh yeah, they've come a long way. You know, it's been a great class. We just meet once a month. and I've been thinking about doing once COVID is gone once.

the pandemic's better can do more social things of doing maybe like a wine and cheese night or, you know, something where we're just hanging out and talking. It's also been really nice because parents have become friends. Now they have like play dates and their kids play together in the backyard. It's been really nice. And it all started - This idea started with our first Suzuki Institute last year at the Omaha conservatory, we had a caregiver class and I noticed how beneficial it was for us to meet one hour every day. And the family just blossomed. The parents were just so invigorated and happy. And I thought, well, I can't do this every week, but I can't once a month. So it's, it's been great. And the parents look forward to it, which is, which is really cool too.

Christine Goodner:

Well, yes. I think there's unique challenges and rewards of parenting and taking care of young music students. And it's just great to talk to other people and be like, oh, it's not just us. And oh yeah, I do remember this part was so wonderful or this part was hard, but now it's better.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

And also a while go, I got some books from a Suzuki teacher that was transitioning into a different career. And I've been reading all these like older books on parenting, which are there's one that is really funny that I just started rereading. It's called. I don't know if you've seen it. It's called how to get your child to practice without resorting to violence. It's hilarious. It's so funny. It's been nice to reread these books and I'm not a parent yet. So it gives me a little bit more of insight of what parents are struggling with and ways of how I can support them.

Christine Goodner:

Right. And I think sometimes hearing from another parent, oh, we've been there. This is how we got through our teacher can tell us that all day, but it's like my, well, that's their job to say that. But if another parent can tell us, I just think it's so powerful to get parents and caregivers to get feed off each other's energy there. I think

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume: That's true. That's true. Yeah.

Christine Goodner: Yeah. I love that. You're doing that. I think that's great

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume: Thank you.

Christine Goodner: You know, some people listening will think about, you know, what, what would that look like for, for me and my program?

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

Oh yeah. And I will say I had this idea for a while, but really what pushed me to do it was when I took your courses, like setting up families for success and there's, and there's another one that I can't, I can't remember the name.

Christine Goodner: It was like supporting home practice

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

And supporting home practice. And I saw that you do parent teacher conferences and you have different things. And it, it can seem very intimidating to the teacher who has never done it, but really you just have to like, go for it, just do it. And then after you do it, you, you feel like, okay, I overcame this and every time it's better. So it's just a matter of starting it.

Christine Goodner:

And like you've been saying, it helps so much and makes my job easier because there's less stress at home in practice. So to me it really feels worth it, even though yes, it takes a little time, but also, you know, you get into a system of it. It's not so daunting to take on as a teacher, but the benefit is amazing. I think it just like the student needs support from their practice partner. The practice partner needs support from us, whatever that looks like in our programs.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume: Absolutely. Yeah.

Christine Goodner:

Well, I love that. How can people find you for example, on social media? Is there any good place people can connect with you if they'd like to learn more about what you do or follow what you do?

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

Yes. Well, you know, I just started a teaching page that I haven't really put anything in there, but it's an Instagram it's at Mrs. Gratia, G R a Z Z I a underscore Rode. I'm sure if you just put Mrs. Dot G a Z, Z I a, I will pop up because my name is very unique. So you'll find me there.

Christine Goodner:

So I can share a link to that as well. So it's easy to just click and find you, but yeah, I enjoy watching and seeing what you share there. Great. Well, thank you so much for sharing a snapshot. I know it's, we're just touching the surface of a lot of what you do and, and how and why, but really great to, to hear what you're involved in. And you've been doing

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume: Thank You.

Christine Goodner:

As we wrap up, I always like to leave the listener with a practicing tip. I wondered what you'd like to share about practice as we finish up today.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

Yeah. Tip for practicing is to have everything in little groups. So if you have a phrase or a measure that is too complicated, you can always break it down to the most simple step and that not only helps you in practicing, but it also helps you in life because that's such a valuable skill to have. So that would be my advice.

Christine Goodner:

Oh, I love that. Yes. I think a lot of people who were musicians growing up, whether they are now or not say that that's kind of what they learned from music is how do I take a big problem and start on the small chunk of it to progress. So I love that. Thank you so much for your time and sharing some of your story as a musician and the work you do really appreciate your time.

Grazzia Rode-Sagastume:

Thank you, Christine. Thank you for having me.