



## Episode 44: An Interview with Alan Duncan

Christine Goodner ([00:00](#)):

All right. Well, welcome everyone. I'm really thrilled today to be talking to Alan Duncan, and we're going to talk about the parent side of music as well as some of his own journey. I'd love for you to introduce yourself to people and, and let them know a bit about what you do related to music.

Alan Duncan ([00:14](#)):

Sure, yeah. It's, it's good to have this conversation. I think it's been, I don't know, it's five or six years since we, since we met in person at American Suzuki Institute. And I feel like this is a long overdue conversation, so I'm really glad to, to be here. My name is Alan Duncan. I live in London, Ontario, which is in Canada. And I probably have the most eclectic background of anybody that you're going to interview on your podcast. And so I, I am just gonna ask you to not hold that against me, but, um, I could just, uh, I'll just tell you a little bit about my own background. I spent the first 20 years of my professional life, uh, as a physician, and so I practiced medicine. AND then the next decade roughly was as a home educator and a Suzuki, violin parent. And then, as we've become somewhat unexpectedly empty nesters, I've sort of branched out and started doing my own musical things. So, I've been involved in, a couple of ventures. One is I play in a number of chamber music groups as a serious amateur. I'm a pianist, and I, volunteer and coach at a local chamber music and performance school, young artist, pre-College Academy here in in London. I'm just, I'm having a blast just volunteering my time, you know, helping out with, with musical kids.

Christine Goodner ([01:36](#)):

I love that. And yes, maybe different than many people I interview's journey, but I bet there's a lot of people listening who can, who can relate to your different phases of life there and how it's morphed. And it sounds, sounds wonderful. It sounds like you're doing lots of exciting, rewarding things.

Alan Duncan ([01:50](#)):

Well, I tell my daughter, you know, who fronts a lot about what should I do? She's 15, she's a serious violinist. And what, what should I do? Should I do music? Should I do something else? Everything sounds interesting to me. And I just, I tell her, look, you know, no one can see all ends. And you, you do what you feel led at at the moment. And, you know, life doesn't fall in a linear direction for any of us. And you

always have the opportunity to, to circle back and, and do where your passion finds you at at the moment. And, to me that's a very liberating way of, looking at things. And that's how I've lived my own life. And I, I hope that's how she lives hers.

Christine Goodner ([02:29](#)):

That's good advice. It can feel like a lot of pressure when you're a young, young person deciding which path to go on. It's nice to know you're not locked into one thing forever. It's a good reminder.

Alan Duncan ([02:40](#)):

Absolutely.

Christine Goodner ([02:40](#)):

Well, maybe since we've talked about your, your daughter who's the violinist already a little bit, do you remember when you - you said you spent that decade, being a home educator and a Suzuki parent to a young musician. Do you remember that start to the music journey for her? And what, what made you want to, give her music in her life?

Alan Duncan ([02:59](#)):

Well, in terms of starting her out on, on her musical journey? It just, it seemed natural to us. I mean, both my wife and I had, uh, done musical training when we were, when we were younger, and it just, it seemed perfectly natural for us. We, we wanted to be able to provide that, that experience to her as well. because it really enriched both of our, our lives growing up. And so I think she was three at at the time, and for some reason, I don't know exactly what I had, the idea that she was going to play the cello. She had never seen a cello, well, I take that back. I think she, we had you know, some of my collaborators in the home and, but she hadn't been asking to play the cello, but I just got it in my head. And so her Montessori preschool where she was attending at the time, had an instrument tryout day at the end of summer in advance of the upcoming year. And so different instrumental teachers had rooms in the school. There was a cello teacher in one room, there was a violin viola teacher in another room, and then the band teacher for the older kids who would teach, uh, wind and brass instruments. And so we marched her into the cello teacher's room, and she absolutely freaked out.

Christine Goodner ([04:17](#)):

Oh no

Alan Duncan ([04:17](#)):

She wouldn't, she wouldn't hold the fractional cello. She wouldn't talk to the teacher. She, she ran outta the room, said, okay, well that was a very short career as a cellist, so how's this gonna work? And so we took her down the hall to the violin viola room, and the teacher was, um, was amazing and very welcoming. And, uh, my daughter just absolutely loved the sound of the instrument. And so that was where it started. And so every, I don't know - Tuesday morning, there was a group class at the school with other three to 5-year-old kids and this wonderfully patient teachers conducted a group lessons there. And that was the start. And then, you know, six months later, she started it in private lessons as many of the kids, uh, did. And we just continued on the Suzuki path for, for many, many years.

Christine Goodner ([05:09](#)):

That's so interesting how different students connect with different instruments right away and maybe even just connected with that teacher.

Alan Duncan ([05:16](#)):

Yeah. I think it's a connection with a personality. I think it's a connection with - you know, there's, there's gotta be something in our brains that, that, uh, that guides us to one particular instrument or the other. For Some reason the violin was, for her.

Christine Goodner ([05:29](#)):

It's, it makes me think, you and I are both active on some of the online Suzuki parent forums. I think that's how we maybe first came across each other. But there is sometimes some angst or question from parents who are contemplating music lessons. Like, what if I pick the wrong instrument for my child? I feel like I see that question a lot. Like, should we pick this instrument or that instrument? And, you know, it can feel, for some people, I see that it feels like they might pick the wrong one and what will happen. So I don't know if you have any thoughts, because I, I see that question often.

Alan Duncan ([05:56](#)):

I do, do have thoughts. I mean, I think it's a little bit like, um, it's a little bit like, you know, overthinking arranged marriages, right? You know, that, that you think, oh, that's going to be, it's gonna be terrible. How would that possibly work out? And I guess in some cases it doesn't, but, but it works out better than you think it does because I think, you know, you sort of grow up with what you're, with, what you're used to. And she grew up with a, grew up with a violin, and she doesn't remember a time when she didn't have a viol in her hands. And, um, it's just, it's been natural. I think it's definitely easy to overthink that, uh, that question. But I don't know. It works out. <laugh>, I think the right instrument finds you. It's, it's like Harry Potter in the wand, you know?

Christine Goodner ([06:36](#)):

I love that. And I think if you're a parent listening and who's thinking about that or maybe overthinking about that, just realizing if you could give your child a strong foundation on one instrument and later they're very drawn to another, you've still given them a great musical foundation in one place that, you know, nothing's been wasted. It doesn't mean a change couldn't happen later.

Alan Duncan ([06:54](#)):

Absolutely.

Christine Goodner ([06:55](#)):

Yeah. I like that your daughter had a chance to be exposed to a few different instruments, and I'm sure heard you play piano in the house and heard other instruments come into the house when you were collaborating. And, um, I think just exposure to a lot of different instruments can help with that too. Well, while we're talking about beginnings, when you, how old were you when you first started playing a musical instrument? Do you remember?

Alan Duncan ([07:16](#)):

Well, I, I joke and say my first, uh, encounter with music scarred me for life. And that was at age three. And it literally did. Uh, but it's only a joke. I I was three years old running around the house, uh, as 3-

year-old boys do. And I ran into the piano and ended up with a split forehead, uh, which needed stitches. And so I guess that, that, that did scar me for life, but not, uh, irrevocably. And, uh, and the piano, I guess was, was my destined instrument. And, um, I was, I was six or seven I think when I started formal lessons. My sister, uh, was 10 years older than I, and she had already taken piano. She was very experienced musician already by that time. And so she had taught me a few things on, on the piano, as, you know, as an older sister could.

Alan Duncan ([08:07](#)):

But in that day and age, this was in the seventies, there, there wasn't much presence of, of Suzuki at all. It was all very traditional. And there, there were rules about who could, who could start instrumental lessons. Like the, the rule was, uh, you had to be reading at a certain level, first or second grade level before you could even contemplate taking piano lessons. So, you know, I patiently waited until that, that time and took lessons as, as to how it was initiated. I think it was just a, an unwritten expectation in our house that you play the piano and, and, uh, and so we did

Christine Goodner ([08:42](#)):

Family culture. Yeah, I like that. And what do you remember about your own practice? Do you have any memories of if it was, you know, hard to learn how to practice, or you had struggles with motivation to practice when you were young?

Alan Duncan ([08:52](#)):

I had no struggles with playing the piano that said, and I never had struggles to sit down at the instrument and place something. What I had a lot of struggles with was really being very disciplined to, to do the hard work of practicing the, the, the, the difficult parts of, of the repertoire. And I think that's something that I think we do more naturally now with, with kids. But back then it was just sort of, you know, there was a, there was a mindset about talent, right? If you were talented, you just figure out how to do it. You would just, you would, you would do it there. We didn't contemplate this growth mindset idea back in, back in that day and age. It was all, you're either talented, you're not. And so you'd bump up against a, a difficult passage and you'd say, well, why can't I do this?

Alan Duncan ([09:42](#)):

It must be something wrong with, with me. And, uh, there was really no way to sort of normalize that experience. I had a, I had a wonderful piano teacher, uh, who was extraordinarily patient through, through difficult times with me as a student. But at the same time, I just, I think that both teachers and students were ill-equipped back in that day and age to, to help students with, you know, with practice strategies and practice techniques. It was always play this, play this, here's this exercise, this, this scale. And you'd go in for your lesson, you get feedback on it, but in terms of really strategizing how you actually work in the practice room, that was something that it really took me until basically adulthood to, to figure that out. And in some ways, it actually took me working with my own child in practice to realize, oh, that's how you practice this. This is how you learn this, this is how you work, uh, in the practice room. And, um, for me, that's been a, it's been a real eye-opener. And, and it's, it's a, it's a way in which practicing with my own child has been, you know, not, not only about helping her develop as a musician and as a person, but, you know, helping me to, you know, sometimes you wonder who was, who's the teacher and who's the student here, right? I mean, you're, you're a teacher. You, you know, this, this feeling.

Christine Goodner ([11:05](#)):

Yeah. And I hear a lot of Suzuki teachers say that they learn a lot from working with their students, say in the same same way of realizing like, oh, this here is in my own planes getting better 'cause I'm helping my students learn how to work out some of these things in a way no one taught me when I was young. So, yeah.

Alan Duncan ([11:20](#)):

And I think that, I think that happens, you know, I think that happens on multiple levels too. It happens, uh, not only in terms of, you know, look, I'm a better practicer as a result of helping my daughter practice more effectively. Yes, that's true. But you know, there's a meta level to this as well, which is I feel like I'm, I'm also a better, a more observant parent as a result of being sort of an observer of that whole process unfolding and, and looking at that with empathy. And, um, yeah, it's just that there's several levels to that, that, that I think are really, um, are a learning experience for, for us as, as musical parents.

Christine Goodner ([11:58](#)):

Absolutely. And there's this thing about re-parenting that's talked about a lot in psychology, where you're just like helping a child work through something that maybe no one helped you work through. Also help helps us just to kind of think about our own emotions about things, you know? Yeah,

Alan Duncan ([12:09](#)):

Absolutely. I, I, there's a, there's a quote that sort of reminds me of a quote from, Carl Jung, the, uh, the psychodynamics, uh, Fruedian and guy. And, um, he said the greatest tragedy of the family is the unlive lives of the parents. But I think that, you know, I think you could also sort of flip that around and say, the greatest opportunities are the unlive lives of the parent, because I think if you're observant about your own experiences, I think you can, you know, try to enhance that for, for your children. I think you can look at it positively as well.

Christine Goodner ([12:39](#)):

Exactly. And there's this quote, Brad Montague, as a artist and writer, I really like, who he just says, like, be who you needed when you were younger. And I really like thinking about that as a, just even in the music world with my own students, like, what did I need as a student or a parent just learning to practice with my child? How can I help parents on that journey? What did I wish people were saying to me? Or, you know, like you were saying, just normalizing and realizing like, this is just the human condition that it's hard to practice

Alan Duncan ([13:02](#)):

<laugh>. That's brilliant.

Christine Goodner ([13:04](#)):

So interesting to think about. Well, when you were practicing with your daughter, let's maybe just talk about when, in those early years when it's just like, how do we get them to practice and how do we work together and everything? Was there anything that surprised you about helping a, a young child start on that journey?

Alan Duncan ([13:19](#)):

Oh, you mean, besides how difficult it is <laugh>? Um, you know, I, I guess I, like I said, I, I was surprised at how much, uh, how much I was going to, to learn about the relationship between parent and child, uh, as a result of this. And, and also how non-linear the, the process was going to, to turn out to be. You know, I had this, this vision in my mind that it was going to be like, uh, like Dr. Suzuki described that it was all happy times and peace and kumbaya, and, you know, sure, there was plenty of that, but I was surprised a lot by, you know, how creative I was going to have to become in order to, to make this work. And so, I, I'll just say straight up, we spent the first year, maybe a little bit longer, really, really struggling with, uh, with making this work.

Alan Duncan ([14:16](#)):

I mean, like, every day this three and a half, 4-year-old falling on the ground in a, in a, in a temper tantrum, and this was, uh, this was startling. I mean, I, we would, we would go visit my, my own parents and they would, they would witness us practicing in, in their, their house. And they would like, how can you possibly torture this child? I mean, this is just, this is, uh, this is terrible. And there's plenty that we didn't, that we didn't do really well. But I think it, it became, uh, a huge motivation for me to figure out how to, to make this work, you know, in, in geometry, the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, right? We all learn this in, in school, but that absolutely doesn't apply to kids learning to play a musical instrument. It is absolutely not the, not the, the, the shortest distance.

Alan Duncan ([15:09](#)):

The shortest distance is, is really whatever it takes to make it work for you. And if that means, you know, meticulously arranging the stuffed animals and the dolls, then that's what you've gotta do. If it means dressing up in a princess costume with, with, uh, butterfly wings to do your practice, that's, that's what you've gotta do. For me, that was the really, the, the biggest surprise. You know, I, I, I read and thought a lot about early on, uh, the Suzuki quote about, uh, where love is deep, much can be accomplished, right? We all, we all say that, and it's, it's sort of a, a, a mantra of Suzuki talent education. But, you know, it always seemed a little aspirational to me. It's like, and then, and then magic happens. Like, you're supposed to have this aspiration and then immediately know what to do to, to solve it.

Alan Duncan ([16:00](#)):

And there is, there are no written rules. You just have to, you have to make it up. You know, I think parents are fortunate now because there, there are resources that they can lean on their online support forums, um, their excellent books, yours included, uh, ed sp Springer's book that I think walk parents through these difficult, these difficult moments. But in the day when we started, this is, you know, 12 years ago that a lot of that didn't, didn't exist at the time. And you always sort of felt like you were making things, uh, make, making things up on your own. But I think there's an active component to this aspirational quote of Suzuki's. And I think it's, it's really this, that yes, much can be accomplished, but it really is, it's, it's up to you to, to figure out how to, how to make that work.

Alan Duncan ([16:50](#)):

And if, if it's important to you, if you love this child, you will figure out a way. It may not be exactly the way that you are envisioning at the, at the beginning, but you will figure out, uh, a way to make it work. And if you have to lean on the community, all the better. Can I just, I just wanna tell you a, a story about a, uh, young boy who is in my daughter's former studio here, here in town, and, um, this young man has, um, has Down syndrome and, um, every week, hi, his grandmother brings him to violin lessons, this

wonderfully patient kind, uh, teacher who, I mean, he's been working on Monkey Song for, I don't know, in Twinkles for, for years. And students would stay after their lesson or come early before their lesson to help to help this, this child. And it, it's all because there's a supportive, loving community. It's his parents, his grandmother loved this kid, and they, they found a way, no, this kid will never play the great concert. But I think everybody realizes that music enriches his life. It, it riches all of our lives in some way, and love Will will find a way. Right.

Christine Goodner ([18:09](#)):

I love that. Yeah, thanks. And I was thinking just that, that "when love is deep, much can be accomplished." Maybe that means arranging the, the stuffed animals, just so when you're thinking like, really can't we just, you know, play this song, but that is a, what does this child need right now and how do we make this work? Like that is a love in a way.

Alan Duncan ([18:25](#)):

Yeah. It's, you know, it's, it's meeting them, it's meeting them where they are, and it's meeting them with, with patience and, you know, of course it means taking care of yourself, right? I mean, I, I think, you know, we all have a reserve that, uh, that can be depleted. And so doing what you can to take care of yourself to, to keep those reserves intact, will help you meet the challenge with creativity and with, uh, and with the patience that's, that's needed to, to get through it. And, you know, you will get through it. You know, there, there, there are bumps in the road. We always said that there are, you know, twinkles of twinkles in an enormous bump. And then, I dunno, there, there are bumps along the way, Etude, Gossec Gavotte <laugh>, you know, you know, the, you know, the big, big bumps in the violin repertoire, but each one is a little bit, is a little bit smaller peak, and it just, it just gets, gets better.

Christine Goodner ([19:18](#)):

Yeah. Thanks. Thanks. I hope that will help other people feel like they're not alone if they're in the midst of that. And I just wanted to highlight what you were saying too, because you were alluding to the fact that there was something bigger you wanted for your child than just what the one day's practice looked like. Like you were thinking about what this was going to give her in a bigger picture way, it sounds like, to get you through that hard period at the beginning.

Alan Duncan ([19:42](#)):

I think you have to keep that in, in mind. At the same time, you have to be willing to let go of, of expectations. And I think that's true for any of us in, in musical practice, not only in helping your kids, but in, you know, helping yourself in practice. That sort of letting go of your expectations about, about the outcome, the immediate outcome of what you're doing, I think is an important piece of having the, the freedom to explore and to improve in the practice room. Because I, I think, you know, having unreasonable expectations of your child, of yourself in the practice room just leads to, to tension, muscular tension that, that precludes, you know, really free production of tone. And it, it also leads to, to just psychological tension and, uh, so to the extent possible, and this is hard, it is hard for, it's hard for me, I can tell you that you just have to let go of of expectations about outcomes.

Christine Goodner ([20:43](#)):

Absolutely.

Alan Duncan ([20:43](#)):

Because I think it's a, it's a, it's, you know, like, like many things, it's, it's just, it's non-linear, and I, you, you know, I've seen you posted this, this graphic many times about what, what practice looks like in, in reality versus what our expectations are. And it's not a straight line. It's a, it's a zigzag all over the place. Yeah. And that's okay,

Christine Goodner ([21:03](#)):

Right?

Alan Duncan ([21:03](#)):

It's messy.

Christine Goodner ([21:04](#)):

Yeah, I think that's a really good point. Let go, let go of the specific expectations, but I think, you know, if we can hold on to just, I believe this will be worth it in the end, that can be very helpful.

Alan Duncan ([21:15](#)):

Yeah. And it, it, so it's, it's less about, it's a, less about the, the specifics of what those outcomes look like and, and more about you know, what is it doing for my child, or what is it doing for me in the, in the end in a, in a broader sense. And that, of course goes back to, to Suzuki's aspirations for what talent education was about in the first place.

Christine Goodner ([21:35](#)):

Absolutely. Well, your child's a teenager now, and I know, you know, there's a lot of years in between there that we could revisit if we want. But I think one of the things we were both saying before we hit record today was the aspect of practice with our children that is talked a little bit less about, at least that I see, is that transition from I'm in the trenches practicing with my child every day, and then that process where they start to become more independent and eventually become independent practitioners. What, what was that process like, um, in your family?

Alan Duncan ([22:04](#)):

Hard .... um, I mean, was it as hard as, as the beginning? Yes ...yes and no. For our particular case, it was very complicated and, uh, largely because I acted as my daughter's collaborative pianist from the very beginning. So I played every single recital. I played every single audition. I, I played everything alongside her. And, uh, that was really, really wonderful bonding experience at, I just, I love being on stage with my daughter, and, um, I thought it was an invaluable experience, and it, it gave her a sensitivity to, to working with an accompanist that I think few other kids have, because we, we did it almost every day. We were, we were working together at, at the piano. That said, it made it very, very, very difficult to, to sort of extricate myself from her process. And so I think our situation may have been a little bit more complicated than the average situation because of that, because of that factor.

Alan Duncan ([23:17](#)):

But I think this is a situation where, you know, I think you really need to rely on the teacher to give guidance and wisdom about how and when to begin that separation process. And to do it in a, in a guided fashion. It also requires a lot of adjustment on the part of the parent to sort letting go again, of these expectations about the outcomes. And I remember my, my daughter was probably 12, and I would



hear her upstairs practicing. My office is just below where she would, uh, practice when she would practice independently. And I would just like sit there. My wife is at the computer behind me, I'm facing my computer, I'm listening to this unfold. And that was out of tune, and she didn't count that right. She needs a little bit more of vibrato and there that shift was . . .

Alan Duncan ([24:07](#)):

And so it's, and it was just very difficult for me to sit on my hands and sort of not, not say anything, but in the end it was really, a matter of being willing to, to let go of, of the outcome. And you know, what, if a performance was imperfect in some way, it probably would've been imperfect no matter whether I had been involved or, or, or not. And so, and it doesn't matter at the end of the day, it doesn't matter. It's, it's, it's what you've accomplished up to that point in the practice room regardless. But it was a difficult, it was a difficult, uh, experience for us. And in the end, what really punctuated for us is she was, uh, she auditioned successfully for a place at the Interlochen Arts Academy. And she's a violin major, now in her second year interlochen.

Alan Duncan ([24:55](#)):

And there's absolutely no (pauses) I mean, she's in a different country. I can't, I can't go practice with her. And so we spent the last six months of her time at, at home - six to nine months, I'll say, with her doing completely independent practice. And, it was probably a much more accelerated time schedule than we would've otherwise. But I think in a, in a typical family, you know, taking a year or two to, to start to extricate yourselves from that, i, I think is, is probably a better way to go about it. It does take a lot of psychological adjustment on our part as parents to be able to get through that process because, you know, you've invested a decade of your life or more in doing this, and it, it really becomes part of your own identity. And, you know, sort of teasing identities apart is just, is tough.

Christine Goodner ([25:50](#)):

It's tough. Yeah. Thanks for talking about that. And I think it's, uh, it's hard to hear the mistakes happening and know, like, well, I could go in there and point that out to them, but then they really do have to kind of go back to their lesson sometimes. And maybe they, at first it's a little bumpier progress, but then the teacher can point out to them how they might practice. Like they're just (pauses) it's healthy to let them even - you know, I always warn people that progress might look a little slow for a little adjustment period, because what they're really learning right now is how to practice even more than how to play this piece perfectly at a certain moment. That's a hard transition too. And I think sometimes people feel like they're treading water a little bit while their child sorts that out.

Alan Duncan ([26:27](#)):

Yeah. And I think you have to have this, I think that you have to have trust in what you've done in the, in the years and years leading up to that, that point, right? That yes, they may not practice really effectively immediately, but you've planted seeds and hopefully you've planted really good seeds from the very beginning that will, that will enable them to, to pay attention, to hear themselves and to, and to adjust their strategy based on what, what's coming out of their instrument. But it does require a, a lot of trust. And, um, I think that's what the Suzuki talent education builds a lot of is this, there's, there's been this, you know, tight relationship between teacher, student, and parent that develops. So over the years, and, you know, I think it's, it's just a deepening, uh, of trust that enables us to feel good about launching them into the world independently.

Christine Goodner ([27:26](#)):

Absolutely. Well, and then I was thinking what I'd love to hear you talk about next too is that even when our children are, and even for you, your child's in a different country, as you were saying, but even when our children are practicing independently, we still have an important role to play. They're still important pieces of their journey that we are involved in. It just might not look like in the nitty gritty practice area. I'm thinking about areas where we, where we support them or encourage them, or even like logistic support. So I wonder if you could talk a bit about what your role looks like now. because I'm sure you're still involved.

Alan Duncan ([27:54](#)):

Yeah, still involved. You know, so, so my daughter will . . . it's, it's very interesting. So my daughter will, will call us up on FaceTime and she'll, she'll call me up with, you know, specific musical questions. So she say, okay, I'm prepping . . . Recently, she, she called me before her, winter jury, and, and she said, okay, can you listen to my concerto movement and, and just give me advice? I said, okay, well play it for me, and I'll see. So I, you know, I listened to it and, you know, I'm a pianist. What can I say about the violin? I played the violin for a little while as a kid, but, you know, certainly not competently now. But, um, so I gave her what advice I could just about, you know, musical qualities and phrasing and whatever. So she'll call me about those, those sorts of things.

Alan Duncan ([28:37](#)):

And so I'm, I'm basically a sounding board musically for her right now. And, um, that's not a bad place to, to be in. It's comfortable for me to, to be, uh, back in that role. And sometimes when she's home on break, I'll practice with her, as well, just, but it's her request. I don't,... it's not something that, that I'll initiate. Now, logistical aspects. So this is very interesting. So I, I practiced with, with my daughter exclusively for, for 10 years. My wife was sort of a supportive role. Now when, when my daughter needs something in terms of logistics, she'll, she'll turn to my wife instead and say, can you help me with this application for summer programs? And so she's partitioned in her mind, - this is the music parent, this is logistics parent. But you know, that's the way families are and it, and it, and it works well.

Alan Duncan ([29:27](#)):

But I think you have to be, you have to be mindful of that shift, as a parent that you're not being passed aside in this process, but your role is going to look a lot, a lot different. And, and sometimes the questions are really, you know, sort of deeper level questions. Like, what do I do with my life? And is music for me? How do I make music, you know, continue, you know, if I choose a different pathway, it's, uh, it's, it's going look different, but it's, you know, it's part of this, it's part of the journey. <laugh>.

Christine Goodner ([30:07](#)):

Yeah. And I think it's a, it shows what an impact a practice relationship over all those years has for a teen or young adults, you know, depending on who's listening to this, to come to a parent and say, what do you think of this? Let me trust you with being vulnerable and playing my music for you, or Can you help me with these logistics? Like, that's, that's a compliment to the relationships that we create with our children through the supportive practice relationship too. I think that's a big deal to be asked to do that.

Alan Duncan ([30:33](#)):

I think it's part of the trust that, as you said, that develops, over the years. And it's, it's a great thing when that happens.

Christine Goodner ([30:41](#)):

Hopefully, those of you listening who have young children and who are in that beginning, how do we just get the practice to happen? That's also another thing to just think about into the future, is I'm developing a relationship with my child and that's going to carry over what do I do with my life, whether they're a musician professionally or not. Having that, that close relationship is really worth it too.

Alan Duncan ([31:00](#)):

I, you know, if you'll permit me, I'll just, I'll use a metaphor for my days in, in medicine, right? So I, I feel like practice was really for us, a like a stress test, right? It's like a cardiac stress test. So if you're suspected of having coronary heart disease, the doctor's going to put you on a treadmill wire you up to the EKGs And, and have you exercise on the on the treadmill and look for evidence electrically that there's something wrong with your heart. And I, I feel like practice is the same for your relationship with your child. It exposes areas where, where you can do better yourself. And for me, that was definitely true. I sort of always looked at it as, okay, this is exposing an area where I need to bring more creativity. I need to bring more empathy. I need to bring more ability to, to sort of let go, whatever, whatever was needed in the moment, it was going to expose that to me.

Christine Goodner ([31:55](#)):

Hmm. I like that analogy. Yeah. I . . . we have to, we get the opportunity, I guess I'll say, to really work on ourselves when we're a Suzuki parent working with our children. Yeah,

Alan Duncan ([32:05](#)):

Exactly. Yeah.

Christine Goodner ([32:07](#)):

Yeah. Well, I'm just noticing, um, you know, we could probably talk all day about all these topics, so I hope we get to do this again. But I do want to let people know you have a blog, the Suzuki experience. Maybe you could just talk a little bit about how people could check that out and where they can find that, um, before we wrap up with a practice tip here.

Alan Duncan ([32:27](#)):

Sure. So years and years ago I started a blog, [suzuki experience.com](#). It's still alive, it needs some love it. Uh, it got a little neglected, I'm sorry, during the, during the pandemic, as a lot of things did in life. Uh, but I'm hoping to bring, uh, more life to it. It's, it's still up online. And I began that with a, just to really document our journey as a Suzuki family. And so it, it starts really pretty early in the process and things that we learned about how to, uh, practice effectively with young people. And so some of my, some of my favorite things that I still recommend to, to parents starting out are, are up as articles on, on the blog. So [suzuki experience.com](#), it's there for the, for the looking

Christine Goodner ([33:17](#)):

Great. Yeah. Thanks. I think that's a great resource. And I love that you have a sort of a time lapse video of years of your daughter's progress in three minutes up there on that blog. That I think just really helps us see a vision for where we might be headed if we're at the beginning stages and everybody's journey's different. You know, if I show that to someone, I always say, you know, there needs to be an asterisk, like your results may vary, but it's really inspiring to see one person's journey, you know, <laugh>

Alan Duncan ([33:42](#)):

<laugh>. Yeah. Well it was fun to do the video and it was more than fun to do the, the, the process that that that that encapsulates.

Christine Goodner ([33:50](#)):

Yeah. Love that. Well, I always love to wrap up with our guest sharing a practice tip that comes to mind. Either one of your favorite practice tips or just something you've been thinking about lately that we could leave listeners with to think about this week.

Alan Duncan ([34:04](#)):

This something that I've been thinking about lately, because I'm always thinking about it. And, it's, it's one word which is attention. And I'll just take two seconds to to tell you the, the story, of why I think about that. So the American poet, Mary Oliver died, I think in 2019. And I went to the library and checked out her last book, which is a book called Devotions. It's a series of essays. And I picked the book up and started reading, and there was one of her essays concluded with this line, which is, "attention is the beginning of Devotion". And it, it really, it hit me like a, like a thunder clap. And, because I think, I think that really encapsulates everything that we are trying to do in a discipline that we, that we love. So what I tell my, my daughter, what I try to tell myself is always, always bring attention to, to what you're doing.

Alan Duncan ([35:02](#)):

And with that attention, it enables you to continually improve. I mean, you can assign a person do 10,000 repetitions of, of whatever, that's fine. But if you're not doing that with attention, you're, you're losing the, the real power in it. And so for me it's just, it's always about bringing attention, whether that's, if you're in a quartet, really attend to the, to the, the tuning. If you're a pianist, really attend to the, the, the feel of the key, the feedback you're getting from the key as, uh, as you're playing, because that gives you important signals into what you're trying to produce, i i in the sound world. And, um, so for me it's just, you know, whatever you do, bring attention to it because that enables everything else. And if you're a, if, if you're a, if you're a parent who's not involved in music, your attention is really on the, the dynamics of your relationship with, with your child being, being observant. Like a, like a third party observer. Watching, watching things unfold in the practice room and bringing, bringing that awareness and attention to it so that you know what directions in which you could be more creative. So attention is the beginning of devotion.

Christine Goodner ([36:15](#)):

I love that. Well, thank you, Alan. It's been a pleasure to speak with you today. I'm so glad we got to connect again, and I look forward to the next time we can do that.

Alan Duncan ([36:23](#)):

I love this. That was great. Thank you. I.